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The Collected Works of
Arthur Symons

Volume 9

Studies in Seven Arts

Studies in Seven Arts

by Arthur Symons

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TO RHODA

DO you remember the first two sentences of Pater's essay on The School of Giorgione? *I will copy them, for they make a kind of motto for my book, and sum up, I think, the way in which you and I (you always, and I since I have known you) have looked upon art and the arts. "It is the mistake," says Pater, "of much popular criticism to regard poetry, music and painting—all the various products of art—as but translations into different languages of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought, supplemented by certain technical qualities of colour in painting, of sound in music, of rhythmical words in poetry. In this way, the sensuous element in art, and with it almost everything in art that is essentially artistic, is made a matter of indifference; and a clear apprehension of the opposite principle—that the sensuous material of each art brings with it a special phase or quality of beauty, untranslatable into the forms of any other, an order of impressions distinct in kind—is the beginning of all true æsthetic criticism."*

With the art of poetry, or of literature in general, I am not here concerned: that is my main concern in most of my other books of criticism. In this book I have tried to deal with the other arts as I know or recognise them; and I find seven: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, handicraft, the stage (in which I include drama, acting, pantomime, scenery, costume, and lighting), and, separate from these, dancing. Each of these arts I have tried to study from its own point of view, and (except in the case of architecture,

which has almost ceased to exist as an art) *in its contemporary aspects, and in those contemporary aspects which seem to me most important or most characteristic. In my endeavour to study each art from its own point of view, it is to you that I owe most in keeping me from slipping, more than I have, into tempting and easy confusions. You have a far clearer sense than I have of the special qualities, the special limits, of the various arts ; and it is from you that I have learnt to look on each art as of absolutely equal value. In my endeavour to master what I have called the universal science of beauty, I owe more to you than to technical books or to technical people ; because in you there is some hardly conscious instinct which turns towards beauty unerringly, like the magnet, at the attraction of every vital current. You will find, then, in this book, much of your own coming back to you ; and, in this dedication, hardly more than the acknowledgment of a little of my debt. But I want the book to be yours, chiefly because we have lived so much of it together.*

ARTHUR SYMONS.

WITTERSHAM,
September 26, 1906.

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RODIN

i

THE art of Rodin competes with nature rather than with the art of other sculptors. Other sculptors turn life into sculpture, he turns sculpture into life. His clay is part of the substance of the earth, and the earth still clings about it as it comes up and lives. It is at once the flower and the root; that of others is the flower only, and the plucked flower. That link with the earth, which we find in the unhewn masses of rock from which his finest creations of pure form can never quite free themselves, is the secret of his deepest force. It links his creations to nature's, in a single fashion of growth.

Rodin is a visionary, to whom art has no meaning apart from truth. His first care is to assure you, as you penetrate into that bewildering world which lies about him in his studios, that every movement arrested in those figures, all in violent action, is taken straight from nature. It is not copied, as you or I would see it; it is re-created, as he sees it. How then does he see nature? To Rodin everything that lives is beautiful, merely because it lives, and everything is equally beautiful.

Rodin believes, not as a mystic, but as a mathematician, I might almost say, in that doctrine of "correspondences" which lies at the root of most of the mystical teaching. He

spies upon every gesture, knowing that if he can seize one gesture at the turn of the wave, he has seized an essential rhythm of nature. When a woman combs her hair, he will say to you, she thinks she is only combing her hair : no, she is making a gesture which flows into the eternal rhythm, which is beautiful because it lives, because it is part of that geometrical plan which nature is always weaving for us. Change the gesture as it is, give it your own conception of abstract beauty, depart ever so little from the mere truth of the movement, and the rhythm is broken, what was living is dead.

We speak of the rhythm of nature. What is it, precisely, that we mean ? Rhythm, precisely, is a balance, a means of preserving equilibrium in moving bodies. The human body possesses so much volume, it has to maintain its equilibrium ; if you displace its contents here, they shift there : the balance is regained by an instinctive movement of self-preservation. Thus what we call harmony is really utility, and, as always, beauty is seen to be a necessary thing, the exquisite growth of a need.

And this rhythm runs through all nature, producing every grace and justifying every apparent defect. The same swing and balance of forces make the hump on a dwarf's back and the mountain in the lap of a plain. One is not more beautiful than the other, if you will take each thing simply, in its own place. And that apparent ugliness of the average, even, has its place, does not require the heightening energy of excess to make it beautiful. It, too, has the beauty of life.

There was a time, Rodin will tell you, when he sought for beautiful models ; when he found himself disappointed, dissatisfied, before some body whose proportions did not

please him. He would go on working merely because the model was there; and, after two hours' work, discover suddenly the beauty of this living thing which was turning into a new kind of life under his fingers. Why choose any longer? why reject this always faultless material? He has come to trust nature so implicitly that he will never pose a model, leaving nature to find its own way of doing what he wants of it. All depends on the way of seeing, on the seizure of the perfect moment, on the art of rendering, in the sculptor's relief, "the instant made eternity."

Rodin was studying drawing, with no idea but of being a draughtsman, when the idea of modelling in clay came to him. He had been drawing the model from different points of view, as the pivot turned, presenting now this and now that profile. It occurred to him to apply this principle to the clay, in which, by a swift, almost simultaneous, series of studies after nature, a single figure might be built up which would seem to be wholly alive, to move throughout its entire surface. From that time until now, he has taken one profile after another, each separately, and all together, turning his work in all directions, looking upward at the model to get the arch and hollow of the eyebrows, for instance, looking down on the model, taking each angle, as if, for the time, no other existed, and pursuing the outlines of nature with a movement as constant as her own. At the end, the thing is done, there is no need of even a final point of view, of an adjustment to some image of proportion: nature has been caught on the wing, enfolded by observation as the air enfolds the living form. If every part is right, the whole must be right. [1]

[1] This method of work is very clearly defined by M. Camille Mauclair, almost in Rodin's own words, in an article on *La*

But, for the living representation of nature in movement, something more is needed than the exact copy. This is a certain deliberate exaggeration; not a correction, not a deviation, but a means of interpretation, the only means by which the softness and the energy of nature can be rendered in clay. It is a manner of expressing in clay what nature expresses with the infinite resources of its moving blood. "All art," said Mérimée, "is exaggeration *à propos*." It is on the perfection of this *à propos* that everything depends, and here Rodin's training as a draughtsman gives him his safety in freedom. He, who never measures his proportions, can rely implicitly on the exactitude of his eye, in preserving the proportion of every exaggeration.

When *l'Age d'Airain*, the bronze which is now in the Luxembourg, was sent to the Salon of 1877, Rodin was accused by the hanging committee of having moulded it on a living model. He protested, there was an official inquiry, and the commissioners came to the conclusion that at least some parts of the body had been thus moulded. It was not until three years later that the charge was finally disproved and officially withdrawn; the statue was again exhibited at the Salon, a medal of the third class awarded to it, and it was afterwards bought by the State. The story is in-

Technique de Rodin: "Il eut l'idée de ne point travailler à ses figures d'un seul côté à la fois, mais de tous ensemble, tournant autour constamment et faisant des *dessins successifs* à même le bloc, *de tous les plans*, modelant par un dessin simultané de toutes les silhouettes et les unissant sommairement de façon à obtenir avant tout *un dessin de mouvement dans l'air*, sans s'occuper de l'harmonisation préconçue de son sujet. C'était obéir aux principes naturels de la statuaire faite pour être vue en plein air, c'est-à-dire la recherche du *contour* et de ce que les peintres appellent *la valeur*." (*Rodin et son Œuvre. Édition de La Plume.* 1900.)

ſtructive, and might be remembered by those who have since brought againſt Rodin so very different an accuſation. Turn from this ſtatue to the marvellous little bronze of " la Vieille Heaulimère " : there, in that re-incarnation of Villon's ballade, you will see the same precision of anatomical design, with an even deeper sense of the beauty of what age and the horror of decay cannot take out of the living body. Rodin has never taken a ſtep without knowing exactly where he is going to set his foot, and he has never turned back from a ſtep once taken. It was not until he could copy nature so exactly as to deceive the eyes of those who imagined that they knew nature when they saw it, it was not until he had the body by heart, that he began to make the body think. He had given it form ; the form muſt be awakened. The touch of life and of thought comes, then, from an exaggeration here, an exaggeration there ; a touch, inexplicable and certain, which is at once his method and his secret.

It is on these two methods that Rodin relies for the rendering of his vision of life. The art of the sculptor gives him but one means of expression ; all is in relief, all depends on the power, balance, and beauty of the relief. Watching the living movement from every angle, turning about it as a wild beaſt turns about its prey, spying for the moment to pounce, seize, and possess, he muſt translate form, movement, light and shadow, softness, force, everything which exiſts in nature, by the cunning adjuſtment of his relief. " Le ſtyle, c'eſt l'homme," we say ; " le modelé, c'eſt l'art," Rodin would say.

Rodin has sometimes been compared with Michelangelo, but it would be more accurate to trace the principles of his art back to the Greeks. The Greeks worked directly from

nature, with a fresh observation, the eyesight of the youth of the world, and its unspoilt mastery of hand. In Donatello we find the same directness, less powerful, but not less sincere. Michelangelo approached nature through Donatello, so to speak, and then departed from nature, with his immense confidence, his readiness to compete with nature itself on a scale more decoratively impressive than nature's. His exaggeration is not the exaggeration of the Greeks, nor is it Rodin's, an attempt at always greater fidelity, at an essentially more precise exactitude; it deviates, for his own purposes, along ways of his own. He speaks truth, but not without rhetoric.

To obtain grace, Rodin will say to you, you must begin with strength; otherwise the work will become hard and dry. "Quelque chose de puissant," he will repeat, with half-closed eyes, the hands clutching upon the imagined clay. If you remind him of Baudelaire's saying: "L'énergie, c'est la grâce suprême," he will accept the words as the best definition of his own meaning.

The later manner of all great artists, in every division of art, obeys the same law of growth. Aiming always at the utmost precision of rendering his subject-matter, the artist comes gradually to take a different view of what precision really is. He begins by seeking a form which can express everything without leaving anything over; he desires to draw his circle round some separate fragment of nature, and to exhibit the captured, complete thing. Only, nature rebels. Something remains over, stays outside the circle. The breath has gone out of the body, the mystery has gone out of the soul. He has cut off his fragment, if you will, but he has cut it off from life. At this point the public accepts his work; he seems to have attained. At this point

he realises how far he is from attainment, and he sets himself to the eternal search. He breaks down the straight limits of his form, he seeks to find new links by which to attach this creature of his hands to the universal life of things. He says frankly to the spectator of his toil : you must come and help me, or I can never tell you all that I have to say. He gives a twofold burden to the lines of his work : that which they express, and that which they suggest. The lines begin to whisper something to the soul, in a remote voice, and you must listen in order to hear it. The eyes have something more to do than to see. The mind must collaborate with the eyes, and both must be content to share with life itself the dissatisfaction of an inexplicable mystery left over at the end.

Rodin's earlier form seemed able to say everything which he had to say ; the modelling was infinitely detailed, the work lived with a vivid life of its own ; and what remained over ? Something remained over, the breath was not yet wholly lodged and at home in the body, the soul was not yet wholly conscious of its power of flight. He began to feel towards another form, apparently vaguer, essentially closer to the idea. He learnt how to indicate by a continually greater economy of means, by omission, by the simplification or synthesis of a great complexity of efforts ; he found out short cuts, which would take him more swiftly to his end ; he built up his new form as much with the brain as with the hand. The Balzac is a divination ; everything is there, and it is there as it must be if it is to be shown by sculpture : all depends on the sheer science of the relief, on the geometry of the observed profiles ; but the life, the mystery, the thing divined, must be divined over again by every one who looks at it. The work is no longer a block cut sharply off from

nature ; it is part of ourselves, to be understood only as we understand one another.

ii

In one of Rodin's finest creations, a great hand, large, strong, and smooth, holds in a paternal grasp a lump of earth, out of which emerge two ephemerides, fragile, pathetic creatures, with the delicate insubstantial grace of passing things, who cling to each other joyously, accepting life on its terms of brief delight. It is God bidding the earth increase and multiply ; it symbolises human life, in all its dependence on that unknown force in the hollow of whose hand it lives and moves. Elsewhere he has indicated the vain struggles, the insane desires, the insatiable longings, the murderous divisions, of the ephemerides, man and woman ; here he indicates their not less pathetic content, the butterfly accepting its hour.

All Rodin's work is founded on a conception of force ; first, the force of the earth, then the two conflicting forces, man and woman ; with, always, behind and beyond, the secret, unseizable, inexplicable force of that mystery which surrounds the vital energy of the earth itself, as it surrounds us in our existence on the earth. Out of these forces he has chosen for the most part the universal, vivifying force of sex. In man he represents the obvious energy of nature, thews and muscles, bones, strength of limb ; in woman, the exquisite strength of weakness, the subtler energy of the senses. They fight the eternal battle of sex, their embraces are a grapple of enemies, they seek each other that they may overcome each other. And the woman, softly, overcomes, to her own perdition. The man holds her in the hollow of his hand, as God holds both man and woman ; he could

close his hand upon the fragile thing that nestles there, and crush it; but something paralyses his muscles in a tender inaction. The hand will never close over her, she will always have the slave's conquest.

Every figure that Rodin has created is in the act of striving towards something: a passion, an idea, a state of being, quiescence itself. His *Gates of Hell* are a headlong flight and falling, in which all the agonies of a place of torment, which is Baudelaire's rather than Dante's, swarm in actual movement. *Femmes damnées* lean upward and downward out of hollow caves and mountainous crags, they cling to the edge of the world, off which their feet slip, they embrace blindly over a precipice, they roll together into bottomless pits of descent. Arms wave in appeal, and clasp shuddering bodies in an extremity of despair. And all this sorrowful and tortured flesh is consumed with desire, with the hurrying fever of those who have only a short time in which to enjoy the fruits of desire. Their mouths open towards one another in an endless longing, all their muscles strain violently towards the embrace. They live only with a life of desire, and that obsession has carried them beyond the wholesome bounds of nature, into the violence of a perversity which is at times almost insane.

But always, in the clay itself, there is ecstasy. Often it is a perverse ecstasy; at times, as in the Iris, as in the Muse who swoops like an eagle, as in the radiant figure with the sun in his hair who flings open the gates of the mountains in the monument to General Sarmiento, it is pure joy; often, as in the Balzac, the Hugo, the Puvis de Chavannes, it is the ecstasy of creative thought. But always there is ecstasy.

In Rodin's sculpture, clay or marble, that something powerful of which he speaks has ended in a palpitating grace,

as of living flesh. He feels, he translates, sensation for sensation, the voluptuous soft cool warmth of the flesh, the daintiness of the skeleton, indicated under its smooth covering ; all that is exquisite in the structure of bone and muscle, in the force of man and the suppleness of woman. The flesh seems to shiver, curdle, tightening upon the bone as if at a touch ; it lies abandoned, in a tender repose ; it grapples flesh upon flesh, in all the agonies of all the embraces. His hand seems to press most caressingly about the shoulder-blades and the hollows of the loins. The delicate ridge and furrow of the back-bone draw his hand to mould them into new shapes and motions of beauty. His hand follows the loins where they swell into ampler outlines : the back, from neck to croup, lies quivering, in all the beauty of life itself.

In the drawings, which constitute in themselves so interesting a development of his art, there is little of the delicacy of beauty. They are notes for the clay, *instantanés*, and they note only movement, expression. They are done in two minutes, by a mere gallop of the hand over paper, with the eyes fixed on some unconscious pose of the model. And here it would seem (if indeed accident did not enter so largely into the matter) that a point in sentiment has been reached in which the perverse idealism of Baudelaire has disappeared, and a simpler kind of cynicism takes its place. In these astonishing drawings from the nude we see woman carried to a further point of simplicity than even in Degas : woman the animal ; woman, in a strange sense, the idol. Not even the Japanese have simplified drawing to this illuminating scrawl of four lines, enclosing the whole mystery of the flesh. Each drawing indicates, as if in the rough block of stone, a single violent movement. Here a woman faces you, her legs thrown above her head ; here she faces you with

her legs thrust out before her, the soles of her feet seen close and gigantic. She squats like a toad, she stretches herself like a cat, she stands rigid, she lies abandoned. Every movement of her body, violently agitated by the remembrance or the expectation, of the act of desire, is seen at an expressive moment. She turns upon herself in a hundred attitudes, turning always upon the central pivot of the sex, which emphasises itself with a fantastic and frightful monotony. The face is but just indicated, a face of wood, like a savage idol ; and the body has rarely any of that elegance, seductiveness, and shivering delicacy of life which we find in the marble. It is a machine in movement, a monstrous, devastating machine, working mechanically, and possessed by the one rage of the animal. Often two bodies interlace each other, flesh crushing upon flesh in all the exasperation of a futile possession ; and the energy of the embrace is indicated in the great hand that lies like a weight upon the shoulders. It is hideous, overpowering, and it has the beauty of all supreme energy.

And these drawings, with their violent simplicity of appeal, have the distinction of all abstract thought or form. Even in Degas there is a certain luxury, a possible low appeal, in those heavy and creased bodies bending in tubs and streaming a sponge over huddled shoulders. But here luxury becomes geometrical ; its axioms are demonstrated algebraically. It is the unknown X which sprawls, in this spawning entanglement of animal life, over the damped paper, between these pencil outlines, each done at a stroke, like a hard, sure stroke of the chisel.

For, it must be remembered, these are the drawings of a sculptor, notes for sculpture, and thus indicating form as the sculptor sees it, with more brevity, in simpler outline,

than the painter. They speak another language than the drawings of the painter, searching, as they do, for the points that catch the light along a line, for the curves that indicate contour tangibly. In looking at the drawings of a painter, one sees colour ; here, in these shorthand notes of a sculptor, one's fingers seem actually to touch marble.

iii

Rodin will tell you that in his interpretation of life he is often a translator who does not understand the message which he hands on. At times it is a pure idea, an abstract conception, which he sets himself to express in clay ; something that he has thought, something that he has read : the creation of woman, the legend of Psyche, the idea of prayer, of the love of brother and sister, a line of Dante or of Baudelaire. But more often he surrenders himself to the direct guidance of life itself : a movement is made before him, and from this movement he creates the idea of the movement. Often a single figure takes form under his hands, and he cannot understand what the figure means : its lines seem to will something, and to ask for the completion of their purpose. He puts it aside, and one day, happening to see it as it lies among other formless suggestions of form, it groups itself with another fragment, itself hitherto unexplained : suddenly there is a composition, the idea has penetrated the clay, life has given birth to the soul. He endeavours to represent life in all its mystery, not to penetrate the mystery of life. He gives you a movement, an expression ; if it has come straight from life, if it has kept the living contours, it must mean something, and he is but your comrade in the search for that meaning.

Yet he is never indifferent to that meaning; he is rarely content to leave any single figure wholly to the chance of interpretation. Rodin is a thinker, as well as a seer; he has put the whole of his intelligence into his work, not leaving any fragment of himself unused. And so this world of his making becomes a world of problems, of symbols, in which life offers itself to be understood. Here is a face, fixed in an attitude of meditation, and set aside unfinished, to which a hand, lifted daintily to the temples, has found its way out of another study; and the man's hand waits, giving the movement which completes the woman's head, until the hand of the same model has been studied in that position. Here two lovers, on the back of an eagle, are seen carried to the same point of heaven on the flight of the same desire. Christ agonises in the garden of Eden, or it may be Prometheus; he is conquered, and a useless angel, who cannot help, but perhaps comes as an angel of glory, hovers down to him. A shoal of rapid Muses, hurrying to reach the poet, swim towards him as upon carrying waves. A great Muse, swooping like an eagle, hurls inspiration into the brain of the poet. Another figure of inspiration, an Iris, meant for the monument of Victor Hugo, is seen arrested in a moment of violent action, which tears the whole body almost in two. With one hand she grasps her foot, drawing the leg up tight against the body; the other leg is flung out at a sharp angle, in a sudden, leaping curve. All the force of the muscles palpitates in this strenuous flesh; the whole splendour of her sex, unveiled, palpitates to the air; the messenger of the gods, bringing some divine message, pauses in flight, an embodied inspiration.

In a group meant for some shadowy corner of a park,

among growing things, dear to Pan and the nymphs, a satyr grasps a woman with fierce tenderness, his gay animal face, sharpened with desire, the eyes oblique like the ears, appearing over her shoulder: his hoofs clutch the ground; one hand catches her by the hair, the other seizes her above the knee, as if to lift her in his arms; she pushes him away, startled, resisting the brutality of instinct, inevitably at his mercy. Here are two figures: one, a woman, rigid as an idol, stands in all the peace of indifference; the other, a man tortured with desire, every muscle strained to exasperation, writhes in all the ineffectual energy of a force which can but feed upon itself. She is there, before him, close to him, infinitely apart, and he could crush but never seize her. In an exquisite and wholly new rendering of the Temptation of St. Anthony, the saint lies prostrate, crouched against the cross, which his lips kiss feverishly, as he closes his pained eyes; the shoulders seem to move in a shuddering revolt from the burden which they bear unwillingly; he grovels in the dust like a toad, in his horror of the life and beauty which have cast themselves away upon him. And the woman lies back luxuriously, stretching her naked limbs across his back, and twisting her delicate arms behind her head, in a supple movement of perfectly happy abandonment, breathing the air; she has the innocence of the flesh, the ignorance of the spirit, and she does not even know what it is to tempt. She is without perversity; the flesh, not the devil; and so, perhaps, the more perilous.

It is interesting to compare this version of a subject which so many artists have treated, always in a spirit of perversity or of grotesque horror, with all those other versions, from Hieronymus van Bosch, with his crawling and swooping abortions, in whom there could lie no possible temptation,

to Rops, with his woman of enticing flesh spread out mockingly upon the cross, from which she has cast off the divine body. To Rodin it is the opposition of the two powers of the world; it is the conflict of the two rejections, the two absolute masters of the human will. St. Anthony cannot understand the woman, the woman cannot understand St. Anthony. To her, he seems to be playing at abnegation, for the game's sake, stupidly; to him, she seems to be bringing all hell-fire in the hollow of her cool hands. They will never understand one another, and that will be the reason of the eternal conflict.

Here is the Balzac, with its royal air, shouldering the crowd apart, as it steps into the final solitude, and the triumph. It is the thinker of action, the visionary creator of worlds, standing there like a mountain that has become man. The pose is that of a rock against which all waves must dash themselves in vain. There is exultation, a kind of ferocity of enjoyment of life and of the making of life, in the great beaked head, the great jaws, the eagle's eyes under the crag of eyebrows. And the rock which suggests the man, the worker wrapped in the monastic habit of his dressing-gown, all supple force under the loose folds of moulded clay, stands there as if growing up out of the earth, planted for the rest of time. It is the proudest thing that has been made out of clay.

It is Balzac, but it is more than Balzac; it is the genius and the work of Balzac; it is the *Comédie Humaine*, it is Seraphita and Vautrin and Lucien and Valérie; it is the energy of the artist and the solitude of the thinker and the abounding temperament of the man; and it is the triumph of all this in one supreme incarnation, which seems to give new possibilities to sculpture.

iv

All his life Rodin has been a fighter, and now, at the age of sixty-one, after the creation of a series of masterpieces, he is still fighting. The history of the Balzac is too well known to need repeating; but that miracle of official imbecility, the refusal of Rodin's work and the substitution of one of the compilations of Falguière (a true artist, born to be a painter, who paints to please himself and does sculpture to please the public) has been followed, only the other day, by a similar insult. The civic authorities of Paris ordered from Rodin a bust of Victor Hugo, to be set up in the Place Royale. Rodin set to work immediately, and produced the bust, which is now to be seen in the Salon; the bust was photographed, the photographs sent to the Hôtel de Ville, and the same evening an official letter was received by the sculptor telling him to consider the order null and void, seeing that an arrangement had been made with another sculptor on better terms (" de considérer comme nulle et non avenue la commande qui m'avait été faite, attendu qu'il m'avait été faite, attendu qu'il avait traité *sous de meilleures conditions* avec un autre sculpteur "). I take these words, which have their value as a document in the history of the relations of art and the State, from a note in the " Gaulois," confirmed by Rodin himself.[1]

[1] A further comment remains to be added. I find in *La Plume* of the 1st May the following note: " Le Conseil, on s'en souvient, trouva trop élevé le prix de 2500 fr. proposé par l'auteur du *Balzac*, pour le buste de Victor Hugo destiné au Centenaire (et qui représentait rien que la récupération des frais). Il s'adressa à un artiste qui faisait 'à de meilleures conditions.' L'artiste a présenté sa note, acceptée incontinent: elle s'élève à 25,000 francs. . . . Le promoteur du vote est M. Quentin-Bauchart; le statuaire s'appelle M. Barreau."

No, even now, Rodin is not accepted, universally accepted, as the one great modern sculptor, as the Wagner of sculpture. It is true that one only needs the eyes to see, that one only needs to open one's eyes, and to forget to bring with one any ready-made ways of seeing. There, precisely there, lies all the difficulty. Hardly any one is able to see what is before him, just as it is in itself. He comes expecting one thing, he finds another thing, he sees through the veil of his preconception, he criticises before he has apprehended, he condemns without allowing his instinct the chance of asserting itself. Take, for instance, the idea of beauty. Almost every one can see the beauty of Raphael, only a certain number can see the beauty of Velasquez, not many can see the beauty of Blake. In the human figure, every one can see the beauty of a breast; not many can see the beauty of a shoulder-blade. In nature, every one can see the beauty of the Alps at dawn; not many can see the beauty of a putrescent pool. Yet all these are but different forms of the same essential beauty; all wait patiently for the same acceptance, all offer themselves to the same mere sight of the eyes.

But we have been taught to see before our eyes have found out a way of seeing for themselves; we have to unlearn whole traditions of prejudice: we have to force ourselves to look things straight in the face. The art of sculpture has seemed the one art which has already reached finality; here, at all events, sighed the public with relief, we shall have nothing more to learn or to unlearn: we know at least what a piece of sculpture is when we see it. From the first Rodin has been perturbing. This warmth of life, is it not excessive? This softness, suppleness, spring, are they quite the qualities proper to sculpture? Here is a back which will shiver if I touch it, but why is the face half lost in

the marble out of which the figure seems to grow? Finally, is this a man or a mountain or an eagle which calls itself Balzac, and is so different from the known portraits of Balzac? Something new has come even into sculpture; there is a troubling upheaval of some restless inner life in the clay; even sculpture has gone the way of all the other arts, and has learnt to suggest more than it says, to embody dreams in its flesh, to become at once a living thing and a symbol.

1902.

THE PAINTING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

i

MR. D. S. MacCOLL'S book on *Nineteenth Century Art* is the most important book on painting which has been published since Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. It is neither a challenge nor a prophecy, and *Modern Painters* was both. It is an interpretation. Mr. MacColl is a painter who is a writer, and not a writer who has studied painting. He is in the movement of the century, and as a painter he has a small, definite place of his own, where a fastidious temperament can be seen at work exquisitely. The main value of the criticism in his book is that it is a painter's criticism, letting one in by secret doors to the recesses of the painter's brain and workshop. But the book is not merely a collection of scattered essays on artists, it is a view of a period of art; an attempt, as we are told in the preface, "to throw the chief figures of the period into perspective; to define their imaginative attitude; to indicate how some of them went with the drift of art special to the century, and others against it." Each artist is studied not only as an artist, but as a temperament, and his intentions are expressed, as often as possible, by quotations from his letters and sayings. This, it seems to me, is how the history of any art should be written; not in a generalised sketch of "tendencies,"

" schools," and the like, but in an eager disentangling of the personality of each artist, of his aims in working, and of the manner of his work. In this research into the springs of action, every word that an artist has let fall about his own art is of value as evidence. Mr. MacColl's book is a storehouse of such quotations, chosen with great skill ; and it contains no other quotations, it is indebted to no other critic, it is all his own.

The modern criticism of painting in England has been, for the most part, somewhat accidental ; we have had, since Ruskin, one or two good books and many good detached essays, but no body of really fine art criticism. The influence of Ruskin has undoubtedly been a good influence ; beauty was to him, literally, what a Frenchman has called it, a religion ; and he preached the religion of beauty at a period almost as much absorbed in the pedantries of science and the ignominies of material success as the present period. Much of his force came from his narrowness ; you cannot be a prophet and a disinterested analyst at the same time. Ruskin did more than any man of our century to interest Englishmen in beautiful things, and it matters little whether his choice among beautiful things was always really the choice of an artist. He could convince the stubborn and Philistine British public, or he could brow-beat that public into fancying that it ought to be convinced. William Morris, who made all kinds of beautiful things himself, and who also tried to argue on behalf of beauty as a socialist orator, has had very much less influence on the bulk of the British public. Morris, however, was really continuing the work which Ruskin began.

Had Walter Pater devoted himself exclusively to art criticism, there is no doubt that, in a sense, he would have been a great art critic. There are essays scattered throughout

his work, the essay on *The School of Giorgione*, for instance, in which the essential principles of the art of painting are divined and interpreted with extraordinary subtlety. I remember hearing him say, that, as he grew older, books interested him less and less, pictures delighted him more and more. But with him art criticism was but one function of a close, delicate, unceasing criticism of life ; and the ideas at the root of painting, as well as of every other form of the activity of the spirit, meant more to him, in spite of his striving after absolute justice, than the painting itself. Thus, even in that admirable essay on Giorgione, he could leave out all mention of *The Geometricians* in the Vienna Gallery, as, in writing subtly about the ideas of Coleridge, he could leave out *Kubla Klan* from the selection of Coleridge's poetry which was to accompany his essay. As it was, he corrected many of the generous and hasty errors of Ruskin, and helped to bring back criticism to a wiser and more tolerant attitude towards the arts.

Everything that Whistler has written about painting deserves to be taken seriously, and read with understanding. Written in French, and signed by Baudelaire, his truths, and paradoxes reflecting truths, would have been realised for what they are. Written in English, and obscurely supposed to conceal some dangerous form of humour, they are left for the most part unconsidered by the " serious " public of the annual picture galleries.

There is one book by another writer who has not always been fairly treated, Mr. George Moore's *Modern Painting*, which stands out among the art criticism of our time. It is full of injustice, brutality, and ignorance ; but it is full also of the most generous justice, the most discriminating sympathy, and the genuine knowledge of the painter. It is

hastily thought out, hastily written; but there, in those vivid, direct, unscrupulously logical pages, you will find some of the secrets of the art of painting, let out, so to speak, by an intelligence all sensation, which has soaked them up without knowing it.

In Mr. MacColl we have the art critic who is at once the painter, the man of letters, and the learned student of his art and of its history. He writes with authority, and his writing is as good as if he were merely amusing himself with phrases. Listen to a few of the phrases, and observe how just is the criticism expressed with so much point and brilliance. Of Daumier he says: "Daumier's style is grand and elemental, his matter is trivial; his effect is the angry assault of that drawing on this matter, the tilt of the lance against the windmill and the sheep." Of Albert Moore: "He is a Pygmalion who transforms the woman into marble." Of Degas: "If gymnastic and poetry have parted company, he takes the spirit of gymnastic where it is." The work of Boucher is "the play and gallantry of Rubens in its last dishevelment." And of music he says, with more amplification, more extravagance, if you will: "An art that came out of the old world two centuries ago with a few chants, love songs, and dances, that a century ago was still tied to the words of a mass or opera, or threading little dance movements together in a "suite," became, in the last century, this extraordinary debauch, in which the man who has never seen a battle, loved a woman, or worshipped a god may not only ideally, but through the response of his nerves and pulses to immediate rhythmical attack, enjoy the ghosts of struggle, rapture, and exaltation with a volume and intricacy, an anguish, a triumph, an irresponsibility unheard of." Sometimes, it is true, Mr. MacColl's vision and judgment seem to be limited a little

by the narrowing perfection of his own definitions. He flashes them out, and they solidify and look so well on the page that they seem to him final. And also, in his sentences, the imagery can become, at times, a little ferocious, the emphasis a little mechanical in its reiteration. He says of Courbet: "He will have no blasphemy of matter; he lets down among the painter Rabbis a St. Peter's sheet, filled with creatures banned as common and unclean in their Numbers and Deuteronomy, and proclaims them all blessed by light." The bricks, in his work, are often better than the building. Every sentence in a paragraph may be good, but the paragraph has only rarely the air of having been composed after a pattern, or to a tune. Most of the sentences could be transposed, each with its separate thing worth saying and well said, and none of them would be the worse for the change. It is in this flaw, perhaps, that one distinguishes the writer to whom writing is a supplementary profession, the writer who is first of all a painter.

ii

"What exactly," says Mr. MacColl, "was the special and final addition made to the instrument of painting in the nineteenth century? It may be expressed by saying that painting accepted at last the full contents of vision as material, all that is given in the coloured camera-reflection of the real world." So far so good, but is that all, or even the essential part, of what the painting of the century has tried to do? Is it not rather that modern painters have tried to do with the aid of nature what the old painters did without it? to find the pattern and rhythm of their pictures in nature itself rather than in their own brains and on their own palettes?

It is not merely a question of seeing things as they are, and "accepting the full contents of vision as material"; it is the deeper and more difficult question of getting nature, seen frankly, into the pattern, instead of coming to nature with one's pattern ready made.

Mr. MacColl has said, in speaking of Turner, precisely what might be said of the whole movement of the century. Turner's design, he says, "is not a rhythm forced on objects from without or uncertainly apprehended in them. It is an eye for their own principle of construction, their private rhythm. . . . To conquer the anatomy and architecture of clouds as well as stationary rock and tree was a feat wonderful enough. But to surprise an intricate rhythm in the welter of waves, to wreathe a sculpture out of the waste wrath and torment of the sea, was his supreme triumph." There, in that triumphant instance, we get the new aim, the new success. We shall see all that is meant by the difference if we turn to an older painter who is a great master of rhythm, to Botticelli. Take, among Botticelli's work, the *Entombment* in the Munich Gallery. Observe how, in that profound and lovely picture, the rhythm which unites all those bending figures is a rhythm not inherent in the figures themselves, not a part of their nature, or even of their actual movement, but brought into them by the painter, for the sake of a fine music which it will make in the picture. Or, to set sea-painting against sea-painting, compare those waves of Turner with the little wing-like waves which carry forward the shell on which Venus is brought to land, in the *Birth of Venus*, in the Uffizi. There, as always in Botticelli, you get a rhythm which winds into its own pattern flawlessly; only the pattern is not nature's nor seen in nature.

The sentiment of nature, as it enters into the painting of the nineteenth century, is a new thing in art. Try to imagine Millet in any other century! To the old painters nature did not exist as nature, only as decoration, or as the interest of locality. It was a matter for backgrounds, a device for "stationing," in Keats's phrase, their figures or their drama. When nature "put them out," it could be altered at will; when nature pleased them, it could be copied separately, with a separate focussing of each square inch of stones or grass. There was the playbuilding of topography, in clear Italian backgrounds, little walled cities on a hill, with their paved roads and chequer-work of streets and gardens; and there was the painter's delight in separate natural effects, in flowers or colours. But the interest has no guardian feeling of fidelity or sense of honour towards nature. Even Giorgione is occupied in making the world a place of rest or enchantment for the men and women who enjoy its leisure. No one has realised that nature can be treated on terms of equality.

To the painters of the nineteenth century nature is life, religion, responsibility, or seduction. There is the devout sincerity of the eye to things seen; there is the mind's acceptance of the principle of life in visible things. From the conjunction of this thought and sight we get the special character of modern painting. Impressionism, in a broad sense the pictorial art of the century, is, in its essential aim, limited to an immediate noting of light, movement, expression; to the exquisite record of an instant. Is it, in Browning's phrase, "the instant made eternity"? If the instant, however deftly rendered, remains temporary, you may have, perhaps, some of Monet's work, but you will have no more than a shorthand note, which the reporter

has not even troubled to copy out. If the instant, " changed not in kind but in degree," take on that incalculable aspect, as of a thing which has always existed and must always go on existing, you have the equivalent, under new conditions, of those masterpieces of the past which can never be repeated, but which may, in any age, be equalled.

" The painting of nature," says Mr. MacColl, very justly, " is not always compatible with the nature of paint, and the ' sense of nature ' depends as much upon humouring the nature of the paint as upon pressing the nature of the thing, upon freshness, limpid ease, untired response." " Manet and Mr. Whistler," he says elsewhere, in a sentence which might follow this one, " are the two artists of their time who are natives of paint, who make a sticky rebellious substance a magical liquid matter." In other words, it is in Manet and in Whistler, among the painters of our own age, that we can see best what the nineteenth century has been aiming at in painting. Of each it could be said, as Mr. MacColl says of Manet : " He resaw the world, remade its pictorial aspect." " He never runs away from his daring vision," says Mr. MacColl, further, of Manet, " to take refuge in a far-away dirty reasonableness ; supplies no buffers for the timid eye, but risks all on the exact rightness of the essential relations." And of Whistler, not less justly : " He has the faith of this art of tones that there is a sacred integrity of beauty in an object seen in its own air, its own light, its own week, its own house ; that ' invention,' when it contravenes the logic of this beauty, tears away just the integument in which the choicest visible life abides."

To Manet, in his vision of the world, everything existed in hard outline. Late in life he tried to see more in Monet's way, but when he was using only his own eyes, it was natural

to him to be very heedful of the silhouette. In seeing, and in rendering what he saw, Manet has, above all, audacity; he cannot conceal his delight in the paint which comes out of his brush like life itself. I have seen painters, standing before a canvas of Manet, lost in delight over the surprising way in which the paint comes alive, with a beauty inherent in itself, yet always on the way to express something. I was able to imagine, from a reproduction, what a certain *Girl's Head* must be in itself, when the actual touch could be followed; and how its severe, exhilarating beauty, in which there is neither waste nor excess, with no more separable meaning than that actually explicit in a living face at which one has looked long, must have deadened or emptied every picture hung near it, as the *Olympia* does in one room of the Luxembourg, and as Whistler's *Portrait of his Mother* does in the next room. When I came to see the picture afterwards, in the International Exhibition of 1905, it was near another, later, more famous picture of Manet, *Le Linge*, and not far off were two pictures of Cézanne and two pictures of Carrière. Cézanne has reduced painting to a kind of science, the science of disempassioned technique. *Cézanne*, says Charles Morice, " ne s'intéresse pas plus à un visage qu'à une pomme, et celui-là comme celle-ci n'ont d'autre valeur à ses yeux que d'être des ' valeurs,' parce que Cézanne n'a que des yeux." The landscape and the still-life study are seen with exactly the same childlike intentness, seen in the child's convention of hard outline, and with all the emphasis of an eye which chases sentiment out of natural things, that it may take them naked and alone. But, it may be questioned, are things ever either naked or alone in nature? Look from Cézanne to Carrière and you will see that everything in the picture, this *Maternité*, this *Mère*

et Fille, is made up of " correspondences," of the harmonies which envelop and unite life with life, life with nature ; that here is a vision of reality so intense that the mere statement of facts no longer needs emphasis. Cézanne's " nature morte " is a lump of the world cut out with a knife ; in Carrière the rhythm of his mother and child almost evades the limits of the frame, seems a wave of the sea arrested in its motion and as if still in movement. In Carrière, as in Rodin, there are no specimens, but growing things ; the flower scarcely plucked, still alive from the root, a part not yet cut off from universal nature. And that is why Rodin leaves the foundations of his form unshaped in the marble, why he gives the animate being some foothold on the earth ; and why Carrière evokes a mist or twilight which clothes his humanity with that tenderness that lurks transformingly behind our eyes when we look on one another, not in observation (which is science), but in love (which is the beginning of art).

And now turn to Manet. " Manet's mind," says Mr. MacColl, " is that joyful, heedless mind of summer, beneath or above thought, the intense sensation of life with its lights and colours, coming and going in the head." " In Manet there is nothing but good painting," says Mr. Moore, in those admirable and revealing pages at the beginning of *Modern Painting*. In those two definitions we get, surely, the final definition of the painter as painter, and they say no more than the strict truth about Manet. Look at the girl's head, and you will find in it a magic which is not magic at all, so far as magic is an evasion or a message from outside nature ; the life that is there is a life of frank paint, neither asserting nor concealing itself ; there is no sentiment which we can be conscious of, no tenderness as with Carrière, yet

still less is there the scientific coldness of Cézanne. It is as if the painter were like the sun itself; an energy beyond good and evil, an immense benevolence, creating without choice or preference out of the need of giving birth to life. There never was such a homage to light, to light as the principle of life, as in *Le Linge*, where the vivifying rays of that impartial sunlight can soak with equal thirst into the ugliness of the child and into the loveliness of the linen. And you may hate the picture as you may hate a day of overpowering heat, yet be no more able to get away from it than you could withdraw from the ardour of nature.

In Whistler it is the reality that astonishes me the most, and the variety with which he represents that reality, going clean through outward things to their essence, that is, to their essential reality; never, like Fantin, setting up an invention in the place of nature. It is remarkable that an artist who may seem, in his words, to have denied nature, or to have put himself arrogantly in the place of nature, should, in his pictures, have given us no image, no outline, no shade or colour, which is not evoked out of a thing really seen and delicately remembered. Tracing the course of his pictures from first to last one sees the technique changing from what is in a sense a realistic to what seems an evasive manner; from the Courbet-like *Wave* of 1861, with its shouldering strength and heavy paint, to the *Nocturne, Blue and Green* of the Thames water asleep, or to those aspects of people and things in which a butterfly seems to have left a little of its coloured dust on a flower as it alights and passes.

Whistler has his own world, which is neither splendid nor affluent, like the world of Watts, but exquisite and exact, and this world he evokes with certainty and aloofness, the artist's aloofness from the aspects which he chooses, for his

own pleasure, out of visible things. And, in his disinterested greediness, which would follow and capture the whole of his own part of the world, he experiments with many mediums and has many manners, though only one style. Each of his pictures has its " minutely appropriate " beauty, its " minutely appropriate " handling. In the *Blue Wave* we see him literally working with Courbet, and this, like the building of Westminster Bridge, has the direct, almost violent truthfulness of Courbet. In *At the Piano* we have all that was most significant in the Pre-Raphaelite movement summed up and surpassed; the *Shipping in the Thames*, with its pale greys and pinks, the ghost of a landscape, is pure Puvis de Chavannes; in *The Purple Cap* we get all Albert Moore, and how much besides! Whatever *The White Girl* or *At the Mirror* owed to Rossetti was a debt already paid before the picture was finished. Japan and Velasquez, whenever they are seen, are seen through creative eyes. And just as in the landscapes and seascapes we see the paint thinning, clarifying, becoming more exquisitely and exactly expressive, so in the portraits and figure-pieces we can trace the elimination of effort, the spiritualising of paint itself; in the white, for instance, cold in *The White Girl* of 1862, more luminous in the third *Symphony in White* of 1867, and finally, in the *Miss Alexander* of the early seventies, a white which is like the soul of a colour, caught and fixed there by some incalculable but precisely calculated magic. It ends, of course, by being the ghost of a colour, as in *The Convalescent*; but all things in Whistler end, when their particular life is over, by becoming the ghosts of themselves.

Whistler begins by building his world after nature's, with supports as solid and as visible. Gradually he knocks away

support after support, expecting the structure to support itself by its own consciousness, so to speak. At the perfect moment he gives to the eye just enough to catch in the outlines of things that it may be able to complete them by that imaginative sympathy which is part of the seeing of works of art. But he can never be content with that service, and demands ever more and more of it, in his challenge with things, with himself. And he comes finally to suppose that all eyes have the sight and sensitiveness of his own ; which is as if one were to expect the A. B. C. class to read Euclid off the blackboard.

The attitude towards Whistler of the older critics and of the public of yesterday was that of a rather vulgar curiosity. He had shown them a glimpse, and they wanted a gulp ; and they pressed close to the canvas to see what a policeman sees when he turns his bull's-eye on the lock of a door. But the closer they got the less they saw, and they went away in a rage and said there was nothing to see. A great man did a great wrong by doing that : the picture which he thought a pot of paint flung in the face of the public can be seen to-day in a private collection, exquisite in its beauty ; and what Ruskin could do seemed to receive a sanction for the public which had just got far enough to see Ruskin. The other picture, which Burne-Jones bore witness against in 1878, and which in 1905 is in the National Gallery, the *Nocturne in Blue and Silver*, was in the Exhibition of that year, and I had been sitting in front of it for a long time, drinking in its cool and remote harmony with unusual delight, before someone came up to me and told me that it was this picture which seemed to Burne-Jones (who yet had a sense of humour) like a bad joke. Vulgar curiosity is never gratified in any of Whistler's pictures. He never stared at nature, and you must not stare

at his pictures. He treated nature as a gentleman treats a lady, and his fine manners were rewarded by exquisite revelations. I am sure that when he was painting a portrait he tried not to see his sitter, but to let that sitter surprise him, as a delicate artist in words lets himself be surprised by ideas, each surprise being like a sudden light. There is always a certain stealth about magic, and the magical quality did not come into Whistler's pictures by a forthright effort. But he prepared for it, and with ceremony, as one prepares for the reception of a guest.

iii

In the nineteenth century, as in every century, there have been painters who have deliberately turned backwards or aside; haters of their own time, haters of reality, dreamers who have wanted to gather in some corner of unlimited space. Poets rather than painters, the visible world has seemed too narrow for them; and one, like Monticelli, has tried to paint in terms of music, and another, like Rossetti, has tried to put the spiritual mysteries of passion, or like Watts, the bodily form of great emotion and high duties, literally upon the canvas. Théodore Chassériau comes partly into this company; his pupil, in a sense, Gustave Moreau, belongs to it wholly; and there is Puvis de Chavannes (with a difference) and Simeon Solomon, and Burne-Jones, and Félicien Rops, and Aubrey Beardsley. Most of them are not perfectly equipped as painters, but may seem to escape from some at least of their limitations by this commerce with another world. All have an interest beyond their mere skill as painters, with various kinds of appeal to those who go to art for something which is certainly not the art of it. They set up wayside

idols to strange gods, and bow down before the Prince of the Power of the Air. Some have a devil, others speak with tongues. They stir the curiosity of their contemporaries more keenly than the painters who merely paint; and are easier to discuss, and more amusing to write about. One translates his own pictures into sonnets, another composes *A Vision of Love in Sleep*, in melodious prose; and Moreau will live in the pages which Huysmans has written about him, at least as long as in his pictures.

I am glad that Mr. MacColl has done, at last, full justice to Chassériau, a painter who is little known, even in France, where he did something to begin several movements. "The noble force, the tired exotic grace, the fluid grey and gold of the deeps of the air . . . *quelque chose qui soit royale et qui reste*," can be divined even in the reproduction of his *Esther*, in which the slim young body, and the arms lifted to knot the hair, recall the more desperate gesture of a *Daphne*, stiffening already into the friendly embrace of the laurel-tree, as the hunter, Apollo, leaps forward, radiant and too late. I remember an English painter, of a wholly different school, stopping short with delight, and pulling out his sketch-book to note the gesture, as he came into a room in which I once had a print of the *Daphne* hanging.

One "strain" of Chassériau, as Mr. MacColl notes, works out in the "monumental art, full of ancient quiet, of the gods and their sacred seats," of Puvis de Chavannes; another, "Greco-Indian, exotic and seductive," in "the fevered impotence of Gustave Moreau, a lover of the pungent spices and heavy incense of painting, but unable to distil them from the thing." Moreau has been chiefly praised for qualities which belong rather to literature than to painting, and much of his work is like the idolatry of a savage drugged with

opium. He has brought together the spoils of many altars, heaped mythology on mythology, and wrought out of his head a barbarous mosaic of decorative detail, which has been seen in no light in which human eyes ever saw. Legendary figures pose academically among landscapes of vegetable jewels. But in some of his work, done for enamelling or for the tapestry of the Gobelins, fantasies in which plain colour is placed against plain colour, and the drawing is rigid and as if petrified, weave admirable patterns, exactly suiting those two formal mediums. And, in some small water-colours hung lately in the Luxembourg, among more ambitious failures, there were miracles of sheer painter's colour, hardly attached to anything, a mosaic of precious stones, but with all the inner fires of the jewels flaming out of the canvas.

One, the unluckiest, of these dreamers who have made a world *à rebours*, and have lived persistently in it, "though the world," the other world, may have had only "a horror of their joy," is Simeon Solomon, a painter who lived on, forgotten, somewhere or other, until 1905, when his death in the workhouse opened to him once more the doors of the Royal Academy. Mr. MacColl does not mention him, though two of his pictures were in the Glasgow Exhibition; but it seems to me that he has his place, not far from Burne-Jones, in any record of the painting of the nineteenth century. Had circumstances been kinder to him, or had he been other than himself, he would have been a formidable rival for Burne-Jones, "where travellers of his tribe," as Mr. MacColl says, "will still be waylaid, on the confines of glamour and sleep." Look through the catalogue of the Royal Academy and of the Dudley Gallery, between 1865 and 1872, and you will find picture after picture, from the *Lady in the Chinese Dress*, with its bad drawing and queer, orchid-like colour,

and exotic and enigmatical expressiveness, to the Academy *Judith and her attendant going to the Assyrian Camp*, of 1872. The very names, *Love in Winter*, *Sacramentum Amoris*, *Hosanna*, suggest Burne-Jones, though they are exactly parallel in date, and are as likely to represent an influence as a following. Others have a more definitely Jewish character, *The Three Holy Children in the Fiery Furnace*, the *Patriarch of the Eastern Church pronouncing the Benediction of Peace*, the *Carrying the Law in the Synagogue of Geneva*; while perhaps what was most significant in this strange temperament is seen in such pictures as *The Sleepers and the One that Waketh*. Three faces, faint with languor, two with closed eyes and the other with eyes wearily open, lean together, cheek on cheek, between white, sharp-edged stars in a background of dim sky. These faces, with their spectral pallor, the robes of faint purple tinged with violet, are full of morbid delicacy, like the painting of a perfume. Here, as always, there is weakness, insecurity, but also a very personal sense of beauty, which this only half-mastered technique is just able to bring out upon the canvas, in at least a suggestion of everything that the painter meant.

In later years Solomon restricted himself to single heads drawn in coloured chalks, sometimes two heads facing one another, the Saviour and Mary Magdalen, the Virgin and the Angel of the Annunciation. The drawing becomes more and more nerveless, the expression loses delicacy and hardens into the caricature of an emotion, the faint suggestions of colour become more pronounced, more crudely asserted. In the latest drawings of all, we see no more than the splintering wreck of a painter's technique. But as lately as ten years ago he could still produce, with an almost

mechanical ease, sitting at a crowded table in a Clerkenwell news-room, those drawings which we see reproduced by some cheap process of facsimile, in pink or in black, and sold in the picture-shops in Regent Street, Oxford Street, and Museum Street. They have legends under them out of the Bible, in Latin, or out of Dante, in Italian; or they have the names of the Seven Virtues, or of the Seven Deadly Sins; or are images of Sleep and Death and Twilight. "A void and wonderfully vague desire" fills all these hollow faces, as water fills the hollow pools of the sand; they have the sorrow of those who have no cause for sorrow except that they are as they are in a world not made after their pattern. The lips are sucked back and the chin thrust forward in a languor which becomes a mannerism, like the long thin throats, and heavy half-closed eyes and cheeks haggard with fever or exhaustion. The same face, varied a little in mood, scarcely in feature, serves for Christ and the two Marys, for Sleep and for Lust. The lips are scarcely roughened to indicate a man, the throats scarcely lengthened to indicate a woman. These faces are without sex; they have brooded among ghosts of passions till they have become the ghosts of themselves; the energy of virtue or of sin has gone out of them, and they hang in space, dry, rattling, the husks of desire.

iv

Clearly marked off from these painters to whom paint has been no more than a difficult, never really loved or accepted, medium for the translation of dreams or ideas into visible form, yet not without some of their desire of the impossible in paint, Monticelli, to whom Mr. MacColl devotes a few, not unsympathetic lines, seems to unite several

of the tendencies of modern painting, in a contradiction all his own. I confess that he interests me more than many better painters. He tries to do a thing wholly his own, and is led into one of those confusing and interesting attempts to make one form of art do the work of another form of art as well as its own, which are so characteristic of our century, and which appeal, with so much illegitimate charm, to most speculative minds.

To Monticelli colour is a mood ; or is it that he is so much a painter that mood to him is colour ? Faust and Margaret, or a woman feeding chickens, or a vase of flowers on a table, or a conversation in a park, or a cottage interior, it is as much the same to him as one title or another is the same to a musician. The mood of his own soul, or the fiery idea at the heart of these mere reds and greens and yellows : that is his aim, and the form which offers itself to embody that desire is a somewhat unimportant accident to him. But since form is the language in which alone we can express thought or emotion, so as to be understood in any very positive or complete way, it is his error to be inattentive to language, forgetting how little we can express by gesture and the sound of the voice only.

But he himself, doubtless, is content with the arabesque of the intention, with a voluptuous delight in daring harmonies of colour, as a musician might be content to weave dissonances into fantastic progressions, in a kind of very conscious madness, a Sadism of sound. Monticelli's delights are all violent, and, in their really abstract intoxication of the eyes, can be indicated only in terms of lust and cruelty. Beauty, with him, is a kind of torture, as if sensuality were carried to the point of a rejoicing agony. His colour cries out with the pain of an ecstasy greater than it can bear. A

weak and neurotic Turner, seeing feverishly what Turner saw steadily in sky and sea, coupled with a Watteau, to whom courtly elegance and the delicate pathos of pleasure had come to be seen tragically, sombrely, vehemently, might perhaps have painted some of these pictures, or at least thought them in such a manner. The painting itself is like the way of seeing, hurried, fierce, prodigal, the paint laid on by the palette-knife in great lumps which stand out of the canvas. Looked at close, some of these pictures seem to be encrusted with uncut jewels, like the walls of the Wenzel Chapel in the Cathedral of Prague. At the proper distance, the colours clash together in that irreconcilable way which Monticelli meant, crude tone against crude tone; their conflict is the picture.

In writing of Monticelli it is impossible not to use terms of hearing at least as often as terms of sight. All his painting tends towards the effect of music, with almost the same endeavour to escape from the bondage of matter; which happens, however, to be the painter's proper material, while it is not the musician's. Monticelli is scarcely at all dependent on what he sees, or rather he sees what he likes, and he always likes the same thing. He tries to purify vision to the point of getting disembodied colour. Other painters have tried to give us the spiritual aspect of colour. He seems to paint listening. Confident, doubtless, in the symbolism by which a sound, a colour, or an emotion may be identical, the expression only being different, not the thing expressed, he hears colour upon a fiery orchestra of his own. And some of the formlessness of his painting undoubtedly comes from that singular confidence of his that the emotional expressiveness of music, together with its apparent escape from formal reality, can be transferred without loss to the art of painting.

Does he not, however, forget that music is really the most formal and even fettered of the arts, a kind of divine mathematics, in which the figures on the slate begin to sing? At one end a dry science, at the other an inspired voice, music can express emotion only by its own severely practical method, and is no more the bird-like improvisation which it is often supposed to be than poetry is the instinctive speech of emotion when it has reached the stage of words. On true principles of analogy, music corresponds to a picture in which there is first of all very careful drawing. But that is not the way in which it is seen by theorists like Monticelli, whom we must take as he is: a painter who would make pictures sing, not according to the rules of music, but according to a seductive misinterpretation of them.

The subjects of Monticelli's pictures are excuses, and the excuse is sometimes almost humorous. He paints a woman feeding chickens, and the incident is only invented to bring a large figure, so over-real as to be almost spectral, against a background of blue-black storm-clouds. He paints a woman washing clothes, and, as one looks at the picture, one sees at first only a background crackling with flames, then a streak of white in the foreground, a river seen for a moment under the shadow of that great light, and then, finally, a woman bending over the water. He paints a nymph, and we see a coarse woman half-naked, seated at the foot of a tree, with a dog at her feet. In another picture two dogs meet in a field, and stare curiously and angrily at one another. Sometimes he seizes upon a really picturesque moment, not neglecting its more obviously dramatic possibilities, as in the scene evoked from *Faust*, or the sober and splendid *Adoration of the Magi*, in which the splendour of robes and crowns has not distracted him from the august

meaning of the legend. He is fond of figures arrested in the pause of a dance, like the three Algerian women in the shadow of a doorway, or the tambourine dance in the open space of a park ; curiously fond also of little naked children and of dogs. His painting often conveys the effect of tapestry, as in the large " Meeting in the Park," with its colour as if stitched into the canvas. His world is a kind of queer, bright, sombre fairy-land of his own, where fantastic people sing and dance on the grass, and wander beside fountains, and lie under trees, always in happy landscapes which some fierce thought has turned tragic ; the painter being indeed indifferent to more than the gesture of his puppets in solid paint, who make so little pretence to any individual life of their own. Their faces are for the most part indistinguishable; all the emotion being in the colour of their dresses, in their gesture, and in the moment's pattern which they make upon the green grass or against ancient walls.

And Monticelli has at least this great quality, among others less great : every touch of his brush expresses a personal vision, a way of feeling colour, and is a protest against that vague sort of seeing everything in general and feeling nothing at all, which is supposed to be seeing things as they really are. Things as they really are ! that paradox for fools. For every one probably, for the artist certainly, things are as one sees them ; and if most people seem to see things in very much the same way, that is only another proof of the small amount of individuality in the average man, his deplorable faculty of imitation, his inability not only to think but to see for himself. Monticelli creates with his eyes, putting his own symbols frankly in the place of nature's ; for that, perhaps, is what it means to see nature in a personal way.

1903, 1905.

GUSTAVE MOREAU

i

IN two pictures of Chassériau in the Louvre we see the origin of both Gustave Moreau and Puvis de Chavannes. *La Chaste Suzanne* does what Moreau tries to do, with a certain artificial but attractive grace ; the conception much more pictorial, the drawing much more sensitive. The colours are a little faint, dry even, but this slender, romantic figure in a romantic landscape makes a picture. In the fresco which hangs beside the Botticellis on the staircase, there is the suggestion of a fine decoration, anticipating Puvis. Both followers went further, each on his own way, than Chassériau, and have eclipsed his fame ; and for the most part those who accept Puvis reject Moreau, and those who exalt Moreau, like Huysmans (to whom he owes the wider part of his reputation), can seem to themselves to have said all when they have said scornfully : " Comparer M. Puvis et M. Gustave Moreau, les marier, alors qu'il s'agit de raffinement, les confondre en une botte d'admiration unique, c'est commettre vraiment une des plus obséquieuses hérésies qui se puissent voir." With which it is possible to agree, in a sense not Huysmans'.

The art-criticism of Huysmans is remarkable as literature, and it is Huysmans who was one of the first to fight on behalf of Degas, of Forian, of the impressionists. But, just as he has written a book on the cathedral of Chartres, and Rodin

can say of it, " One does not get much benefit by reading it " ; just as he has written of religion without convincing most Catholics that he is really a sincere Catholic ; just as he has written elaborately about plain-song without making it clear that he understands music ; so, in his eloquent and picturesque writing about pictures, it is rarely from the painter's point of view that he approaches them. In the first edition of *Certains* there was an essay, on a picture in the Louvre, a *Virgin and Saints* of Bianchi, a mediocre picture, which seems to have interested him solely because, as he says, " de cette toile s'exhalent pour moi des émanations délicieuses, des captations dolentes, d'insidieux sacrilèges des prières troubles." In an essay on Félicien Rops, finer as literature than any of the designs about which he writes, he overlooks all that is cold, trivial, and mechanical in this " diabolic " art, in his delight in its homage and learned eulogy of evil. He writes of Odilon Redon as one would hardly be justified in writing of Blake ; and, finally, seems to find in Gustave Moreau the painter of all others best suited to evoke his own eloquence, a painter at last really palpable, a mine of literature, and he has praised his *Salome* with this elaborate splendour :

" A throne, like the high altar of a cathedral, rose beneath innumerable arches springing from columns, thick-set as Roman pillars, enamelled with vari-coloured bricks, set with mosaics, incrusted with lapis lazuli and sardonyx, in a palace like the basilica of an architecture at once Mussulman and Byzantine. In the centre of the tabernacle surmounting the altar, fronted with rows of circular steps, sat the Tetrarch Herod, the tiara on his head, his legs pressed together, his hands on his knees. His face was yellow, parchment-like, annulated with wrinkles, withered with age ; his long beard

floated like a cloud on the jewelled stars that constellated the robe of netted gold across his breast. Around this statue, motionless, frozen in the sacred pose of a Hindu god, perfumes burned, throwing out clouds of vapour, pierced, as by the phosphorescent eyes of animals, by the fire of precious stones set in the sides of the throne ; then the vapour mounted unrolling itself beneath arches where the blue smoke mingled with the powdered gold of great sunrays, fallen from the domes.

" In the perverse odour of perfumes, in the over-heated atmosphere of this church, Salome, her left arm extended in a gesture of command, her bent right arm holding on the level of the face a great lotus, advances slowly to the sound of a guitar, thrummed by a woman who crouches on the floor.

" With collected, solemn, almost august countenance, she begins the lascivious dance that should waken the sleeping senses of the aged Herod ; her breasts undulate, become rigid at the contact of the whirling necklets ; diamonds sparkle on the dead whiteness of her skin, her bracelets, girdles, rings, shoot sparks ; on her triumphal robe, sewn with pearls, flowered with silver, sheeted with gold, the jewelled breast-plate, whose every stitch is a precious stone, bursts into flame, scatters in snakes of fire, swarms on the ivory-toned, tea-rose flesh, like splendid insects with dazzling wings, marbled with carmine, dotted with morning gold, diapered with steel-blue, streaked with peacock-green.

. . . . . .

" In the work of Gustave Moreau, conceived on no scriptural data, des Esseintes saw at last the realisation of the strange, superhuman Salome that he had dreamed. She was no more the mere dancing-girl who, with the corrupt torsion of her limbs, tears a cry of desire from an old man ; who,

with her eddying breasts, her palpitating body, her quivering thighs, breaks the energy, melts the will, of a king ; she has become the symbolic deity of indestructible Lust, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, the accursed Beauty, chosen among many by the catalepsy that has stiffened her limbs, that has hardened her muscles ; the monstrous, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible Beast, poisoning, like Helen of old, all that go near her, all that look upon her, all that she touches."

In these pages of *A Rebours* the art of Moreau culminates, achieves itself, passes into literature.

ii

Gustave Moreau is haunted by the image of Salome, and he paints her a hundred times, always a rigid flower of evil, always in the midst of sumptuous glooms or barbaric splendours : a mosque, a cathedral, a Hindu temple, an architecture of dreams. She is not a woman, but a gesture, a symbol of delirium ; a fixed dream transforms itself into cruel and troubling hallucinations of colour ; strange vaults arch over her, dim and glimmering, pierced by shafts of light, starting into blood-red splendours, through which she moves robed in flowers or jewels, with a hieratic lasciviousness. A sketch (painted, almost carved, on wood) shows her swathed in savage fripperies, advancing on the tips of her toes, her feet and ankles tattooed with jewels, holding the lotus in her right hand, her head crowned by a tiara ; cloths, ribbons, all sorts of coloured streamers, swing heavily about her, heavy as lead, the image of an idol. He sees her always with flames, flowers, and blood about her.

And he is haunted by other tragic women : Delilah, Judith, Messalina, Cleopatra, Helen on the walls of Troy ;

he sees even Bathsheba tragically. Unachieved as pictures, coming into existence through all manner of borrowings, they remain graven images of the spectral women that haunt the brain of the student. Helen becomes an image of stone or salt, greenish-white against stone pillars and a sky with white stars ; the face blotted out, a spectre seen by the brain with shut eyes. He paints Cleopatra, and you see an explosion of fierce colour, a *décor*, and then, vaguely, a mere attitude, the woman. He paints Francesca da Rimini and you see an immense room, with a black window at the back, menacing with light ; then, gradually, a red spot huddled in a corner, which is Francesca. It is the theatre of life which interests him, not life, and not nature : an architecture of the brain, an atmosphere called up out of unrealised space.

Moreau is the mathematician of the fantastic, a calculating visionary. In his portrait of himself one sees a sickly dreamer, hesitating before his own dreams. His effects are combined mentally, as by a voluptuary who is without passion. His painting is sexless and yearning, and renders the legends of sex with a kind of impotent allurement. Leda and the swan recur as a motive, but in the rendering of that intense motive there is no more than decorative toying, within landscapes crackling with ineffectual fire. Sometimes colour is sought, sometimes line ; never the kernel and passion of the story. And it is the same with Helen, Bathsheba, Messalina, Eve and the Serpent, and the eternal Salome ; always the same strengthless perversity, fumbling in vain about the skirts of evil, of beauty, and of mystery. What he tries to suggest he has not realised ; what he realises he has not seen ; his emotion is never fundamental, but cerebral ; and it is only when he shuts it wholly within his colour, and forces his colour for once to obey his emotion (as in a little

Magdalen on Calvary, with the three crosses black against hills corroded out of sunsets), that he is able to produce a single imaginative effect, that he is able to please the eye by more than some square or corner of jewelled surface into which life comes surreptitiously.

Moreau, I have heard Rodin say, was a man of science, a great combiner, one of a generation which was taught to study art in the galleries, and not from nature. Out of this art life is rigorously excluded. His figures, prettified from the antique, are uninteresting and express nothing; interest comes into the picture from the surroundings, and in the wake of the title. His landscapes are made of rocks, trees, water, hills, and chasms, neither drawn nor coloured after nature, nor composed on any of nature's plans. His light is neither that of the sun nor of the moon, but a light imagined in a studio, and fitted into the pattern of a design. And this artificial world is peopled with reminiscences. He does not even choose among schools or among ages; but will be Greek or Hindu indifferently, and with an equal incapacity for reflecting any faithful image. He seems to look through coloured glasses, and when I stand before his pictures I am reminded of those travellers who, when they cross the sea, put on red spectacles that they may not see the moving waves as they are, but after some unnatural and comforting compromise of their own.

Moreau has this in common with all visionary artists, that he sees in nature only what he brings into it. But is it really vision that he brings, and under what imaginative light has he seen these feeble shapes and arbitrary brilliances? Are they not laboriously sought out, made to order, in a sense, not even records of a fever or of a delirium (as in the vast and violent canvases of Henry de Groux), but painstaking

fantasies, the rendering of moods in which all the excitement has come mechanically, by the mere " will to dream " ?

When Blake fails, it is the failure to translate a thing seen into a visible thing. Moreau's failure is not that of a vision unachieved, but of a plan imperfectly carried out. Geometry breaks down, a bit of the mosaic has been wrongly placed ; patience or skill has given out before the end is reached. When he paints in pattern, as in the Chinese architecture of his *Chimères*, I cannot feel that he really sees in pattern, but that he has worked it out by a kind of dovetailing, square inch by square inch. He says, I will paint Venice in a symbol ; and he sets towers and domes against the sky, and fills the foreground with a nude figure, clay-coloured and with folded wings, lying at full length among inexplicable bushes. He paints a *Fée aux Griffons*, and it is a Bourguereau transposed into the terms of enamel. He takes a subject of Blake, and paints *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, with a similar flame-winged angel in downward flight. But even here the Parisian ideal of prettiness cannot be driven out of his head, nor the Paris art-student's timid correctness out of his hand. Beauty, to him, is bounded on the one side by prettiness, on the other by the fantastic and the unnatural. At a touch of nature his whole world of cold excitement would drop to pieces, scatter into coloured fragments of broken glass.

The world of Moreau is made of coloured glass and jewels. His colour is always startling, sometimes intense ; like his whole work, it aims at effect, and it is that portion of his work which most often or most nearly succeeds. He encrusts his canvases with gesso, with metal, and with glass. In the Palazzo Martinengo at Brescia there is a quaint picture of *St. George and the Dragon* attributed to Giovanni Donato

Mont' Orfano, which is like an anticipation of this part of Moreau. The armour is of actual steel and iron, the lance of iron, and pointed with steel; there are brass and steel knobs and nails and circlets on the horse's harness. Thus, in Moreau's *Fleur Mystique* there is a design built up like Le Puy, with rocks and halos and jewelled crowns and tiaras and petals of tin and stems of coloured glass. But with Moreau nothing is painted for its own sake, but for the sake of some enigmatical transformation. He paints a tea-rose, and the flower petrifies, turns into a jewel. The cactus, which should be his favourite flower, becomes a menace of rosy flame; but he tries to make the leaves mysterious, not by painting them as they are, and thus loses much, softening what is sharply artificial and unreal in the actual thing. He is at his best, nearest to imagination, when he sees almost nothing but colour, setting mass to cry against mass. Thus it is only in his small compositions, his sketches, that he makes any genuine appeal as a painter. In the " Grand Salle " of what was once his house, and is now the " Musée Moreau," he has let in daylight on vast canvases, and that light shows us all that is threadbare in them, their cold frenzies, their gaudy commonness. In the small, bright sombre things, in the lower rooms, there is the effect, strange, disconcerting, attractive, of a kind of transposition of whole picture-galleries of pictures. All are translated into another language, in which they speak with a fascinating foreign accent.

iii

In one of the rooms of the Musée Moreau there is a copy of Carpaccio's *St. George and the Dragon*, and by its presence there it seems to make criticism easier. By the

side of what is youthful and naïve in Carpaccio's realising imagination, all these laboured inventions seem to drop away into some sick region of no-man's land, where an art of spectacular illusion sets a tragic ballet, tragic and Parisian, posturing uncertainly across the footlights of picture-frames. A note which I deciphered on the margin of one of the drawings indicates enough of the aim: "Orphée mourant, toute la Nature en pleurs, tous les animaux—les satyrs, les faunes, les centaures, etc., toutes les créatures des poètes—dans des mouvements de désespoir. Nature en deuil." The stealthy snarer is seen setting his traps for attitudes.

It is not in this way, from the outside, that great art, above all great visionary art, is made. There is equal need of "fundamental brain-work" in a picture and in a poem, if either is to be properly imaginative. All Moreau's pictures are illustrations of legend; it is only rarely, as in the eternal Salome, that they create a new, personal form for legend, and even Salome is for the most part seen meagrely, a costumed doll, to whom Huysmans must add meaning as he adds a rarer colour. At times the painter can produce an effect of actual hallucination, but the effect is superposed upon a purely academic groundwork; his drawings are all of studied poses, carefully and unsensitively copied; colour is called in to give heat and singularity to a structure at once cold and commonplace.

When Moreau is at his best, when his colour is almost a disguise, and the conventional drawing, the doll-like figures, the forced emphasis, the prettiness, are buried out of sight under clots of paint, out of which the sunlight sucks a fierce brilliance, there are moments when it is possible to compare him with Degas, the painter of modern things, whose work is to be seen not far off on the walls of the Luxembourg.

What Moreau does with colour combined with outside reality, Degas does, and more discreetly, with colour caught in real things : a hanging on the wall, a carpet under the feet, a frame of theatrical scenery, which becomes a vision as he looks at it, and the equivalent of imagination. And in Degas the beauty is a part of truth, a beauty which our eyes are too jaded to distinguish in the things about us. Degas finds in real things, seen at the right moment, all the flames and all the jewels of Moreau. And thus, in his acceptance of reality, he has created a new and vital form of art ; while Moreau, in his rejection of space and time, has but combined pictures out of other pictures. His art was sterile from the first, and but repeats the ineffectual spells of a solitary magician. But at least he lived his own life, among his chosen spectres.

1905.

WATTS

i

ALL his life Watts was a seeker, and at eighty-three, in a landscape exhibited at the New Gallery, he is still seeking, and has indeed found a rare, new kind of perfection, landscape so delicately felt that it seems to exist as if nature had never been painted before. In his earliest work he is coldly, almost unintelligently, academic; a half-draped figure in his studio stands there insultingly soulless, among these pictures into which all the exaltations of the spirit have passed, like a flame, a cloud, or a mist, glorifying the body of material things. Gradually intention enters into form, not yet filling it. A figure of Satan indicates the malevolent pride of the intellect, in the poise and gesture of a body only partly alive and but slightly touched with beauty. A nude figure, awkwardly drawn, and set in the midst of a landscape whose very ugliness is a kind of promise, shows us another search in another direction. A group, harshly drawn and crudely coloured, contains one figure bent over upon itself, in a curve afterwards to be subtilised into the bowed and unwearied tenderness of *Hope*. The painful earnestness of portraits fixes us with an almost audacious confidence in the power of intention, its power over an immature technique and over a rebellious sitter, unwilling to render up a secret. One portrait, hard

in outline as Manet, anticipates crudely some of the after-effects of colour, and gazes into our eyes with a triumphant sensuality of soul, implacable, amiable, interrogatory. Thoughtfulness comes slowly into these faces, as the soul of the painter trains his hand to finer uses. At first a blank, then an animal intelligence, then will, then the desire of beauty, or knowledge, or power, then the consciousness of self, then personality unconscious even of its own presence, then the passion of an idea, into which the whole man passes, more visibly than in life (as in the portrait of Joachim), or the soul itself, fluttering a faint body as a flame is fluttered by the wind (as in the portrait of Swinburne), the portraits grow before us, building up man out of dust and breath, as in the first creation. And always hand and soul move forward together. As intention comes into the work, the work becomes firmer ; as the power of expression increases, the power of conception increases with it. And it is not merely a personality becoming more and more able to find its own words for its own thoughts : it is a great pictorial intelligence mastering secret after secret of the world's beauty, of the beauty of the body and the soul of man, of the beauty of every symbol by which any divinity can be made visible.

More than most painters, most at least of those painters who have the genuine pictorial sense, Watts's quality of vision is conditioned by a moral quality of mind. He sees nobly, he sees tenderly, he sees disinterestedly. There is a little picture of the head of a donkey, full of a perfectly simple feeling for a despised animal taken for once frankly on its own merits, without disdain and without dishonouring pity, which seems to me to indicate with great clearness the peculiarly honest quality of his imagination. I do not always feel that in every one of his allegories he is quite sure

of the limits of pictorial expression, that he surrenders himself quite fully to the thing seen, without undue confidence in the meaning behind it. But the mind which sees visible things as the symbols or messengers of moral ideas has conceived a whole world upon canvas in which there is not a mean or trivial corner. He paints nakedness with the strenuous and manly purity of one to whom the body is the divinest thing in the world, and he paints the faces of men with the passionate and interpreting and surrendering intuition of one to whom the soul is the divinest part of the body. His landscape is that of one for whom the finger of God is continually creating the earth over again, day by day, at sunrise, at twilight, and at sunset. A great joy breaks out of all his work, as if the face of man and the body of woman, and the form and colour of the earth and sky, were not so much the slaves and recipients of light, waiting for the moment in which they should become worthy of art, but themselves radiated light out of their own substance, and art were rather a waiting upon the moment in which it should apprehend something which was already there all the while.

And so it is that the portraits, always so beautiful as pictures, seem always to show an understanding of the people who have sat for them, more, probably, than the people themselves have ever had. It is not character merely, or merely a choice from among emotions, as one emotion comes interestingly into a face, or the gesture which renders the outward man so that we may recognise him in the street; it is a brooding unconsciousness, coming up into the eyes and fixed there in all its restlessness; the inner mystery itself, not the explaining away of that mystery; the ultimate dumbness of the soul, as trivial things drop away from it, and

it stands lonely, questioning, unfathomably secret. For every soul has its own way of being silent, of looking into the darkness at the end of the long avenue, of knowing how little it can ever know, and how much of wisdom lies in that very acquiescence. It is that moment which Watts chooses out of all the moments, and it is in his choice that he is most sharply distinguished from most other fine or powerful modern painters, to whom the accident of life has for the most part been everything. Whistler, with his unerring "science of beauty," his unerring sense of the painter's opportunity, poises his fingers on the turn of a heel, in the act of buttoning a long glove, the hand resting jauntily upon the cane, the child's feet grasping the floor, the aged man or woman outlined against a dim grey wall with the immobility of the wall itself. Sargent pours the crude light of the studio roof upon all in a man that would most escape that interrogation, crying to him roughly to speak out, stripping off some of his shyest and most honest disguises, and giving us, as the truth, whatever remains over after the soul has been frightened out of sight. Manet is not more tender, but he is more complete in his capture, giving us life, as well as the moment, and the whole sensitive intelligence of the flesh, which to him is the whole of life. All these will have things their own way, will snatch the beauty or the energy which they desire, like a thing possessed wilfully; only Watts is content to wait, disinterested, humble, incurious, sure that the secret, if not the meaning of the secret, will come to him.

And it is in the same way that he apprehends other secrets. In the beginning his line was careful, by no means sensitive, his colour harsh. Line came to him, when he began to see form as beauty's outline, colour when he began to see colour

as the vesture of beauty. In an intermediate stage, which has its interest, he painted pictures which have something in common with the early work of Millais (certainly not their technique) almost pre-Raphaelite pictures, in which there is a frank and drily pictorial acceptance of the accidents, not necessarily beautiful, of modern life. These careful pictures lead, through many stages, to scenes and figures out of the Bible, or the romances of chivalry, and these to the more truly imaginative pictures in which legend or history is excuse for an attitude or an idea, and finally symbol becomes embodied in almost an abstract way. Cain or Eve, Psyche or the Angel of Pity, these figures have at once the excellence of humanity and an evident meaning beyond their mere presentment of themselves, which deepens into a kind of mental emotional background. The Psyche in the Tate Gallery is one of the loveliest nude figures ever painted, and it reveals depth within depth of delight, subtlety within subtlety, instead of standing there, mere beautiful flesh, like the Leighton on the other side of the wall. In the shrinking tenderness of the line which caresses the drooping figure, in the pearl-white satin of the flesh, in the fall of the arms and hands, the bend of the head, there is a symbol made perfect in humanity, the symbol of the awakening to love, the soul becoming conscious of the body, the body becoming conscious of the soul, as soul and body see love for the first time. Eve, in her creation and her transgression, a figure of opulent and barbaric vehemence, flowers up among a tumult of blossoms, as if the spirit of the earth had taken a new form, more wonderful than the form and colour of the flowers. Where Love and Life meet, where Love and Death meet, the great abstract tragedy becomes at once more abstract and more human, as these passions clothed with delicate bodies, made

out of a life which is our life, and yet finer, more subtle, more spiritualised, than earthly flesh, pause on the first and last threshold and exchange the eternal salutation. And here, whenever he is fully himself, himself at his best, there is no conflict between form and meaning, the symbol is more than allegory, the picture is more than a painted poem.

It has often been said, both in praise and in blame, that Watts is a poet rather than a painter, that he has a literary, not a pictorial, meaning to convey, and that he is to be judged for his intentions rather than for what he has actually done in paint. So far as this is true, it is the severest condemnation which could be passed upon the work of a painter, and it is not without truth, but only a measure of truth. False symbolism, symbolism which is false if only because it is obvious, and because its meaning can be detached entirely from the manner of its expression, so that the beauty and skill of the picture neither add to nor take from its significance, is seen very clearly in a comparatively early picture in the Studio, in which a knight follows after the bubble reputation to the edge of a precipice, over which his horse heedlessly shoulders an old man, as he himself plunges forward into the depths. The bubble is there, flying before, and behind are brother and wife and child, abandoned, and watching the inevitable. Here, as in some of the much later pictures (*Mammon*, for instance, and *The Spirit of the Churches*), the idea is not implicit in the lines of the composition, it is a thing super-added, like a trinket or a fetter. In the two extraordinary pictures called *The All-Pervading* and *The Dweller in the Innermost*, mesmeric dolls, like figures drawn by a medium in a state of trance, too faithful to what seems to be actually seen to be able to create an image

of unseen things in a form intelligible to ordinary sight, there is a complete abandonment to the fallacy of vision, which leaves us with coloured vacancy, neither beautiful to the eyes nor satisfying to the intelligence. But in such pictures as *Hope*, as *Love and Life*, and as *Love and Death*, as in such simpler single figures as Psyche and the Eves, it is the picture that makes the meaning, and not the meaning that makes the picture. The Psyche is so expressive because it is so lovely, and because it could tell us all that we really need to know about it if we knew nothing of the story after which it is named, but looked into it as into a divine mirror, reflecting to us something of the shape of our own souls. These symbolical figures are conceived first of all as pictures, or rather the picture and the meaning of the picture have grown up under the brush together. There, indeed, in that difference between symbol and allegory, lies all the difference between what belongs to the art of painting and what exists outside it, properly outcast.

In every fine picture of Watts, what is finest in it is not the moral idea which informs it, but the artistic skill by which that idea is embodied pictorially. In no sense an original thinker, Watts was one who felt nobly and could paint greatly. He paints always with a sense of the glory of the world, of human glory, of the supreme glory of the spirit, or of God, which makes all these lesser glories. No detail stops his vision, or puts out his hand, which sweeps freely, at home among splendours. His is a kind of heroic world, in which there are only nobility and affluence; every colour and every contour is noble and ample, only sometimes the painter's enthusiasm for things loses the subtler beauties which are in them, and so loses truth, as well as this more

intimate beauty, by the way. He paints, certainly, the world he lives in ; and what more can any one ask of any painter ? And it is his feeling, not his thought, that has impressed itself upon his work whenever it is good ; and it is through the emotional quality of his work, conveyed to us through fine or adequate technique, that he has become the favourite painter of so many earnest people.

Take, for instance, *Love and Life*, which, we are told, Watts considered " perhaps his most direct message to the present generation." As a message nothing could be more obvious ; it is not a philosophy, it is a truism. It could be sufficiently expressed by the statement that love supports and uplifts. But as a picture it is full of delicate grace ; the lines are tender, the design is strong and simple. Take the most popular of all the allegories, *Hope*. Its symbolism is not really fine, not intellectually satisfying. But as a design it has a thrilling quality which artists like Leighton and Tadema have never approached, in that technical skill which consists in giving life to a correctly drawn outline. One need only compare it with any one of the figures in Leighton's *Garden of the Hesperides* to see the whole extent of this difference. Take the *Happy Warrior*, which is again a popular favourite. Here there is a certain touch of sentimentality, the prettifying of an idea ; but what real grace, feeling, charm, in the delightful youth, who meets his death like any St. Sebastian, joyously. In all these pictures the idea, such as it is, is a sufficient and not too obtrusive part of the design, and the design itself has fine pictorial qualities. In none of them, perhaps, is the mental conception quite so transfiguring an element of the design as in the early *Psyche*. But turn for an instant to any of the later and more determined allegories, to *Mammon*, for instance. Here the

symbolism by means of which the lesson is to be taught has become an end in itself, it is worked out in complicated details which appeal to the understanding rather than to the sight. And this symbolism is not subtle, it is not vision, but analogy, and the result is a painted melodrama with a good moral.

A painter of souls, like Blake, must always obtain a large part of the admiration, or the forgiveness, which we extend to him, by his technical skill in the treatment of material to which success is impossible. The direct representation of anything unseen by the eyes, and only mediately conceived by the imagination, can only affect us in the way intended by the artist if it makes its appeal to us by its qualities of beautiful line, beautiful colour, or beauty of composition. Blake, at his best, is so tremendous, because in his endeavour to give form to the morning stars singing together, and God riding on the whirlwind, and the worms talking to one another on the earth, he creates line, and the movement of figures, and the passion of gesture, with so unwearied an energy. Where the line is poor, the conception dwindles: no profound meaning was ever conveyed in pictorial art except through sureness of hand, through a technique definitely excellent in its own way. The mistake of those who have praised such a painter as Blake for his conceptions, and condemned him for his technique, lies in a confusion between what is artistically right, that is, truthful to beauty, and what is academically correct, that is, faithful to rule. God's arm, in the drawing at the beginning of *Europe*, is out of all human proportion in a figure done after the ordinary type of humanity; but the arm is technically superb, because it expresses the instant energy of omnipotence, not to the mind, but to the mind through

the eye, unhesitatingly. Poor technique would have been to have drawn a faultlessly modelled arm, and to have left mind and eye uninterested and unconvinced.

But there are painters who are not painters of souls, like Blake, but painters of dreams and the brooding imagery of the senses, like Rossetti; and these, too, are able to bring us under the subtlety of their mesmerism only by their masterly obedience to technique, not by their disregard of it. Rossetti had never so great a command over his material as Watts, but his pictures are good or bad just in proportion as he admitted or refused to admit the limits of pictorial expression, and the degree to which idea or sensation can be symbolised in form, of which the idea or sensation is only a passing guest. As his intention overpowered him, as he became the slave and no longer the master of his dreams, his pictures became no longer symbols, but idols. Venus, growing more and more Asiatic as the mooned crescent begins to glimmer above her head, and her name changes from Aphrodite into Astarte, loses all the freshness of the waves from which she was born, and her own sorcery hardens her into a wooden image painted for savage worship. Dreams are no longer content to be turned into waking realities, taking the colour of the daylight, that they may be visible to our eyes; but they remain lunar, spectral, an unintelligible menace. We begin to guess at the meaning of pictures which no longer delight us as pictures, turning to the sonnets on the frames.

But Watts, though he is an attentive host to dreams, and the interpreter of souls, rarely loses control of his own vision, or confuses spiritual reality with a reflection of some image by which his brain receives a glimpse of spiritual reality. He makes the great compromise willingly, accepting

the compensation ; and remains a painter, instead of failing to be a poet.

ii

" With the language of beauty in full resonance around him," said Watts, in a profound article on *The Present Conditions of Art*, " art was not difficult to the painter and sculptor of old as it is with us. . . . Every artist must paint what he sees, rather every artist must paint what is around him, can produce no great work unless he impress the character of his age upon his production, not necessarily taking his subjects from it (better if he can), but taking the impress of its life. . . . In many respects the present age is far more advanced than preceding times, incomparably more full of knowledge ; but the language of great art is dead, for general, noble beauty pervades life no more. The artist is obliged to return to extinct forms of speech if he would speak as the great ones have spoken. Nothing beautiful is seen around him, excepting always sky and trees, and sea ; these, as he is mainly a dweller in cities, he cannot live enough with." Here, then, we have a sort of personal confession of faith, a statement, at all events, of a definite theory of art. " The artist must paint what is around him," yet, since " the language of great art is dead," he must " return to extinct forms of speech " : there, in a word, is both the principle and the practice of Watts, the eclectic principle, as it is called, with its acceptance of all that is helpful in tradition, rather than the defiance of an originality which needs to assure itself that it stands alone.

Admitting, as every artist must admit, that beauty is the supreme end of art, yet admitting also, as every critical intelligence must admit, that the forms and manifestations of

beauty are infinite, the problem to the artist of to-day, lies in the choice between many difficulties. Modern dress, hideous in the case of men, rarely quite humbly enough subservient to the body in the case of women ; the surroundings of our lives, the ignoble outward conditions under which, for the most part, we exist ; the abandonment of ritual and ceremony, in which a certain orderly beauty had once come to the aid of our religious meditations and our more serious civic movements ; our haste to improve the mechanical side of civilisation, regardless of the fitness of things to the eye as well as to the hand ; all this has left little ready-made material for the painter anxious to create visible beauty over again on this canvas. It is with a kind of despair that a painter like Burne-Jones turns his back on the world, and, shut away from nature in a studio, copies figures, designs, patterns, which once meant something quite personal to an early Italian painter, but which can now mean nothing at all, until mere persistence in copying has trained one's hand to a kind of second nature, as a man acquires a foreign language by talking in it until at last he can think in it. Gustave Moreau, taking no definite model, but adapting many suggestions until he had formed for himself a composite, artificially personal style, without relation to anything in the universe, except his own intention to see things so, makes images of a world of jewels and the smoke of incense, and the bodies of men and women like flowers turned human by enchantment, but keeping in their fixed eyes and rigid limbs the drowsiness of a sleep from which they have only half awakened. To such painters as these, beauty and the modern world are in open and inevitable war ; life is a thing to be escaped from, not turned to one's purpose ; let us paint pictures, they say, pictures of pictures.

But to another, just now more acceptable, school of painters, the modern world is a thing to struggle with, to conquer in fair fight, to compel to one's purpose, no matter at what cost. French painters, from Courbet to Degas, English painters like Whistler and Sargent, have come to believe, not, as I have pointed out, that beauty can only be rendered by fine technique, but that beauty can be found in technique only. Degas is typical of the school to which subject-matter is indifferent, treatment everything. Or it would be more correct to say that the uglier the subject, the better excuse does it give for virtuosity of technique; so that Degas, in his revolt against the academic treatment of the nude, pretty under impossible conditions, strips a middle-aged model, sets her to stand in a tin bath and squeeze a sponge over her shoulders, so that the attitude reveals every thickening crease of flesh, every falling away of contour, every physical degradation of age, the very impress of the whalebones of the corset, the line which darkens the neck where the collar of the dress had ended. Painting the dance, he takes us behind the scenes, showing us two homely girls in practising-dress, straining a leg forward and backward against a bar in side-practice, while the shoulder-blades stand out like knives, and the whole body aches with effort. And Degas does what he wants, his pictures have the beauty of consummate skill, they have all that ingenuity of mind and mastery of line can give us, which every artist must admire, as he would admire a drawing by Leonardo; but there they end, where the Leonardo drawing does but begin.

There is yet another way in which the modern world can be approached in art, and Whistler has succeeded in obtaining both modernity and beauty by a method faultless in its kind; but, after all, not the method of the greatest masters, above

all not the method of Velasquez. Whistler tricks life and the world into beauty by accepting in them only what suits his purpose, as indeed every artist must do, but also by narrowing his purpose until it is indeed, for the most part, aptly symbolised by the butterfly of his signature. Just as in the art of life, in which he was so engaging a practitioner, he evaded a difficult issue by the disconcerting sting of a pleasantry, so, in the art of painting, he evades the graver difficulties by the agility of his choice. In a few of the greatest of his portraits, the portrait of Carlyle, of his mother, for instance, he has faced every problem, solved every problem triumphantly, and produced masterpieces. There, the pattern does not dwarf the body, nor the voices of the colour sing down the soul. Something of the gravity, sureness of adjustment, strength and self-control of the Greeks informs these pictures with a noble completeness of life. But there are times when his vision is that of a creature of painful nerves, who shudders at the contact of the crowd, and averts his eyes from the ugliness of suffering and the soil of labour, and is not quite happy under the grossness of sunlight, and cultivates a shy sympathy with the moon. He gives us the ghost of the river, people who are the phantoms of moods and moments, a whole shadowy world, in which beauty trembles and flutters, and is a breath escaping upon a sigh, or dimming for an instant the tranquillity of a mirror. Velasquez accepts life, making it distinguished by his way of seeing it, not so much choosing from among its moments as compelling a moment to give up the secret of a lifetime. The beauty of Velasquez is a beauty made up of a choice and a very carefully studied vision of reality; but the vision is always noble, without partiality or eccentricity, as if a great brain were always at work there, behind the eyes. Seeing life steadily,

and seeing it whole, he brought the world grandly into his work, all the world, only nothing ignoble. Beauty came to him, more directly than it has come to any other painter of humanity, from the mere thoughtfulness of life itself.

In the painting of Watts there might seem at first sight to be a certain lack of originality, at all events in the manner of his work; and this might seem to be seen in the very variety of his pictures, the ease with which he passes from the heavy, solid painting of the two assertive babies who stand side by side in a little canvas, like two little living pieces of brown earth, to the ghostly flesh of Uldra, faint as snow-flakes, scarcely to be recognised as human at all. But there is a profound kind of originality, which becomes so by its very refusal to take any of the obvious roads to that end. The style, here, is not in any complete sense the man, but rather the man, the spirit of the man, pervades his work with a kind of self-abnegation, resolute to speak "the language of great art," and that language only, no matter who may have spoken it before, with indeed a grateful humility towards all those who have spoken it.

And so when a composition of Watts reminds us of something which we have already seen, and may seem already too much like the National Gallery to be quite sure of ever having a place there, we must remember that, to Watts, unselfishness is a part of art, and faithfulness to a significant beauty the one necessity. What he creates is a picture, properly pictorial, not the mere painting of an idea, but the picture comes to his hands through his soul, and does not begin to interest him until he has seen further than the limits of its outline. An artist may paint a good picture by painting as Degas did, a man sitting at a café-table drinking absinthe; but to Watts that would not be a great picture, because it was

not filled with a great meaning, beyond the pictorial meaning of its actual lines and the psychological meaning of its realism, or truth to common nature. And, to him, to obtain a handling distinctively personal in manner, apart entirely from what that handling tries to embody, would seem as much beside the question as to aim at this busy, passing capture of things on the wing, the unimportant truth of the moment. Looking for a noble kind of beauty, he sees as if with tradition in his eyesight, and it is really " what is around him," as well as within him, that he paints in those symbols of passionate human ideas, Love, Life, Death, Hope, Pity, into which the human form comes in a perfected way of its own, with chastened flesh and meditative eyes, and a drapery which might so easily be the conventional drapery of studios, but for the sensitive warmth of the hand which has given meaning to its folds. An embracing imagination quickens these canvases into an unfaltering life of the soul; the same imagination fingers the clay and moulds the bronze into exactly the same vehemence of beauty. The opal of a miraculous landscape, a landscape which catches and creates upon canvas every colour of a harlequin opal, has the same feeling, truth, tenderness, the same nobility in the adoration of beauty, as the supreme tragedy of *Paolo and Francesca*, in which, perhaps, the work of the painter reaches its highest point of complete achievement.

In *Paolo and Francesca* passion is seen eternalised at the moment of weary ecstasy when desire has become a memory, and memory has extinguished the world. These bodies are like the hollow shell left by flames which have burnt themselves out, and they float in the fiery air, weightless and listless, as dry leaves are carried along a wave of wind. All life has gone out of them except the energy of that one

memory, which lives in the pallor of their flesh, and in the red hollows of the woman's half-closed eyes, and in the ashen hollows of the man's cheeks. Paolo almost smiles ; Francesca opens her lips as if still in thirst of that kiss, but her lips are shrivelled, and his remain closed for ever. Her hand, a faint, glimmering thing, from which the sense of touch has almost ebbed out, still seeks his hand, and his hand receives it, with so extreme a weariness that the thumb remains just lifted from the clasp, not touching her. A mortal faintness envelops them, in the folds of drapery, in the languor of the bodies, to which death has brought neither forgetfulness nor separation, only the swoon which follows passion, made endless, and aware of its own helplessness. Pride in the man's face heightens its anguish, giving it a steadfast and angry dignity ; but the face of the woman is all eaten up by anguish ; there is nothing in it but anguish and the hopelessness of desire which has been fulfilled and not satiated with fulfilment. Now, they do not love, nor repent, nor hope, only remember ; they have lived, they are no longer living, and they cannot die.

And that quality of imagination, which in this picture is the eternity of the weariness of the senses, burns with an equally steadfast flame in all the finer work of Watts. There is a baby head and shoulders of Ganymede, which might be taken as the type of this kind of imaginative painting, in which the spirit of the work is like a light shining through crystal, an inner radiance, informing the whole luminous substance. The head with all its curls is tossed up towards the sunlight, drinking it in with the petulant vehemence of childhood ; flashes of white light strike on the breast and into the wide-open eyes and across the eager shoulder ; the eyes are full of the laughter of animal joy, the breast

pants, as if it felt the warmth of day in its veins. And in the symbolical figure of Hope, so full of meaning, but of meaning which is all beauty, an imagination which has become almost impersonal, in its renunciation of all but the humility of service to a deep, emotional conviction, takes hold of us, and draws us up into its own finer atmosphere, by an irresistible charm of line and colour and something else, which is after all the personality of the painter.

1900.

WHISTLER

i

WHISTLER is dead, and there goes with him one of the greatest painters and one of the most original personalities of our time. He was in his seventieth year, and until quite lately seemed the youngest man in London. Unlike most artists, he was to be seen everywhere, and he was heard wherever he was seen. He was incapable of rest, and incapable of existing without production. When he was not working at his own art, he was elaborating a fine art of conversation. In both he was profoundly serious, and in both he aimed at seeming to be the irresponsible butterfly of his famous signature. He deceived the public for many years ; he probably deceived many of his acquaintances till the day of his death. Yet his whole life was a devotion to art, and everything that he said or wrote proclaimed that devotion, however fantastically. I wish I could remember half the things he said to me, at any one of those few long talks which I had with him in his quiet, serious moments. I remember the dinner party at which I first met him, not many years ago, and my first impression of his fierce and impertinent chivalry on behalf of art. Some person officially connected with art was there, an urbane sentimentalist ; and after every official platitude there was a sharp crackle from Whistler's corner, and it was as if a rattlesnake

had leapt suddenly out. The person did not know when he was dead, and Whistler transfixed him mortally, I know not how many times ; and still he smiled and talked. I had said something that pleased Whistler, and he peered at me with his old bright eyes from far down the room ; and after dinner he took me aside and talked to me for a full hour. He was not brilliant, or consciously clever, or one talking for effect ; he talked of art, certainly for art's sake, with the passionate reverence of the lover, and with the joyous certainty of one who knows himself beloved. In what he said, of his own work and of others, there was neither vanity nor humility ; he knew quite well what in his art he had mastered and what others had failed to master. But it was chiefly of art in the abstract that he talked, and of the artist's attitude towards nature and towards his materials. He only said to me, I suppose, what he had been saying and writing for fifty years ; it was his gospel, which he had preached mockingly, that he might disconcert the mockers ; but he said it all like one possessed of a conviction, and as if he were stating that conviction with his first ardour.

And the man, whom I had only before seen casually and at a distance, seemed to me almost preposterously the man of his work. At dinner he had been the controversialist, the acrobat of words ; I understood how this little, spasmodically alert, irritably sensitive creature of brains and nerves could never have gone calmly through life, as Rodin, for instance, goes calmly through life, a solid labourer at his task, turning neither to the right nor to the left, attending only to his own business. He was a great wit, and his wit was a personal expression. Stupidity hurt him, and he avenged himself for the pain. All his laughter was a crackling of thorns under the pot, but of flaming thorns, setting the pot in a fury

of boiling. I never saw any one so feverishly alive as this little, old man, with his bright, withered cheeks, over which the skin was drawn tightly, his darting eyes, under their prickly bushes of eyebrows, his fantastically-creased black and white curls of hair, his bitter and subtle mouth, and, above all, his exquisite hands, never at rest. He had the most sensitive fingers I have ever seen, long, thin, bony, wrinkled, every finger alive to the tips, like the fingers of a mesmerist. He was proud of his hands, and they were never out of sight; they travelled to his moustache, crawled over the table, grimaced in little gestures. If ever a painter had painter's hands it was Whistler. And his voice, with its strange accent, part American, part deliberately French, part tuned to the key of his wit, was not less personal or significant. There was scarcely a mannerism which he did not at one time or another adopt, always at least half in caricature of itself. He had a whole language of pauses, in the middle of a word or of a sentence, with all sorts of whimsical quotation-marks, setting a mocking emphasis on solemn follies. He had cultivated a manner of filling up gaps which did not exist; "and so forth and so on," thrown in purely for effect, and to prepare for what was coming. A laugh, deliberately artificial, came when it was wanted; it was meant to annoy, and annoyed, but needlessly.

He was a great wit, really spontaneous, so far as what is intellectual can ever be spontaneous. His wit was not as with Oscar Wilde, a brilliant sudden gymnastic, with words in which the phrase itself was always worth more than what it said; it was a wit of ideas, in which the thing said was at least on the level of the way of saying it. And, with him, it was really a weapon, used as seriously as any rapier in an eternal duel with the eternal enemy. He fought for

himself, but in fighting for himself he fought for every sincere artist. He spared no form of stupidity, neither the unintelligent stupidity of the general public, and of the critics who represent the public, nor the much more dangerous stupidity of intelligences misguided, as in the "leading case" of Ruskin. No man made more enemies, or deserved better friends. He never cared, or was able, to distinguish between them. They changed places at an opinion or for an idea.

He was a great master of the grotesque in conversation, and the portrait which he made of Mr. Leyland as a many-tentacled devil at a piano, a thing of horror and beauty, is for once a verbal image put into paint, with that whole-hearted delight in exuberant extravagance which made his talk wildly heroic. That painting is his one joke in paint, his one expression of a personal feeling so violent that it overcame his scruples as an artist. And yet even that is not really an exception; for out of a malicious joke, begun, certainly, in anger, beauty exudes like the scent of a poisonous flower.

Many of his sayings are preserved, in which he seems to scoff at great artists and at great artistic qualities. They are to be interpreted, not swallowed. His irreverence, as it was called, was only one, not easily recognisable, sign of a delicate sensitiveness in choice. And it had come to be one of the parts that he played in public, one of the things expected of him, to which he lent himself, after all, satirically. And he could be silent on occasion, very effectively. I happened to meet him one day in front of the Chigi Botticelli, when it was on view at Colnaghi's. He walked to and fro, peered into the picture, turned his head sideways, studied it with the approved air of one studying it, and then said

nothing. "Why drag in Botticelli?" was, I suppose, what he thought.

ii

Taste in Whistler was carried to the point of genius, and became creative. He touched nothing, possessed nothing, that he did not remake or assimilate in some faultless and always personal way: the frames of his pictures, the forms of the books which were printed for him, the shapes of the old silver which he collected, the arrangement of that silver when it was exhibited among other collections. The monogram which he designed for a friend who was a publisher is the simplest and the most decorative monogram that I can remember. He drew the lettering for the books of another friend, and this lettering, which seems the most obvious thing in the world, makes the lettering on every other modern book look clumsy or far-fetched. And in none of these things does he try to follow a fine model or try to avoid following a model. He sees each thing in its own way, within its own limits.

No one ever had a more exact and reverent sense of limits, a narrower and more variable standard of perfection. He mastered, in his own art, medium after medium, and his work, in each medium, is conspicuous for its natural sense of the canvas or the paper, for its precise knowledge of exactly what can be done with all the substances and materials of art. He never sought novelty by confusing two methods, but made the most of each with a tender and rigid economy. When he paints, you distinguish the thread of his canvas; in his etchings and lithographs the meaning of the design extends to the rim of the margin.

And of all modern painters he is the only one who completely realised that a picture is part of the decoration of a wall, and of the wall of a modern room. When pictures ceased to be painted on the walls of churches and palaces, or for a given space above altars, there came into the world that abnormal thing, the easel-picture. At the present day there is only one country in which the sense of decoration exists, or is allowed to have its way; and it was from the artists of Japan that Whistler learnt the alphabet of decorative painting. His pictures and his black and white work are first of all pieces of decoration, and there is not one which might not make, in the Japanese way, the only decoration of a room.

Once, indeed, he was allowed, as no other great artist of our time has been allowed, to decorate a room for one of his own pictures. The Peacock Room was made out of gradual transformation, and it was made as a sort of shrine for the lovely picture, *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine*. Every inch of the wall, ceiling, and wainscoting, the doors, the frames of the shutters, was worked into the scheme of the blues and golds, and Mr. Leyland's china had its part, no doubt, in the scheme. But I do not think Whistler can be held responsible for the gilded cages (though, indeed, making the best of a bad bargain, he gilded them) which prop up the china round so much of the walls. These, I gather, he found already made, and with them he had to struggle: he accepted them frankly, and their glitter is a pretence on his part that he liked a room hung with bird-cages and plate-racks. But the gold peacocks on the shutters, with their solid and glowing fantasy of design, the gold peacocks on the blue leather of the wall facing the picture, with their dainty and sparkling fantasy of design, the sombre

fantasy of the peacocks' feathers, untouched by gold, their colours repressed and withdrawn into shadow, above the lamps on the ceiling: all these, into which he put his very soul, which are so many signatures of his creed and science of beauty, are woven together into a web or network of almost alarming loveliness, to make a room into which nature, sunlight, or any mortal compromise could never enter, a wizard's chapel of art. Here, where he is least human, he joins with that other part of himself in which all his sense of what goes to make decoration mingled with another sense, completing it. When he is greatest, in the portrait of his mother, for instance, he is only more, and not less, decorative, as he gives you so infinitely much more than mere decoration. There is no compromise with taste in the abandonment to a great inspiration. Inspiration, with him, includes taste, on its way to its own form of perfection.

It was characteristic of Whistler that he should go to music for the titles of his pictures. A picture may indeed be termed a *Nocturne*, even more justly than a piece of music, but it was quite as it should be if Chopin really was in Whistler's mind when he used the word. Gautier had written his *Symphonie en Blanc Majeur* before Whistler painted his *Symphonies in White*, *Harmony in Grey and Green*, *Arrangement in Black and Brown*, *Caprice in Purple and Gold*: all are terms perfectly appropriate to painting, yet all suggest music. And to the painter of Sarasate, music could hardly have failed to represent the type of all that his own art was aiming at, in its not always fully understood or recognised way. In music, too, he had his significant choice. I remember once his impatience with my praise of Ysaye, whom he had never heard, because the praise

seemed like a poor compliment to Sarasate, whose marvellous purity of tone he recalled with an intolerant and jealous delight. He thought, and was perhaps right in thinking, that there never could have been a purer tone than Sarasate's, and the rest mattered, at all events, much less.

And so, in speaking of Whistler's pictures, though nothing so merely and so wholly pictorial was ever done, it is musical terms that come first to one's mind. Every picture has a purity of tone like that of the finest violin playing. Sometimes a Giorgione, sometimes a Watteau, comes to one as if in exchange for music; Whistler always.

"Art should be independent of all clap-trap," he wrote, in one of the most valuable of his pastorial letters, "should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it; and that is why I insist on calling my works 'arrangements' and 'harmonies.' Take the picture of my mother, exhibited at the Royal Academy, as an *Arrangement in Grey and Black*. Now that is what it is. To me it is interesting as a picture of my mother; but what can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait?"

There, finally stated, is one of the great, continually forgotten, truths of art; and, in the paragraph which follows, the lesson is completed. "The imitator is a poor kind of creature. If the man who paints only the tree, or flower, or other surface he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer. It is for the artist to do something beyond this: in portrait painting to put on canvas something more than the face the model wears for that one day; to paint the man, in short, as well as his features; in

arrangement of colours to treat a flower as his key, not as his model."

In *Mr. Whistler's Ten o'Clock* he tells us: "Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick and choose, and group with science, those elements, that the result may be beautiful—as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he brings forth from chaos, glorious harmony. To say to the painter that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player that he may sit on the piano." Now, in all this, which was once supposed to be so revolutionary, so impertinent even, there is just so much exaggeration as wit lends to any single aspect of truth which, in our time, most needs emphasis.

In our time, art is on its defence. All the devouring mouths of the common virtues and approved habits are open against it, and for the most part it exists on sufferance, by pretending to be something else than what it is, by some form of appeal to public charity or public misapprehension; rarely by professing to be concerned only with itself, and bound only by its own laws. Great critics like Ruskin and great artists like Watts have done infinite harm by taking the side of the sentimentalists, by attaching moral values to lines and colours, by allowing themselves to confirm the public in some of its worst confusions of mind. When Whistler said of one of his "harmonies in grey and gold," in which a black figure is seen outside a tavern in the snow, "I care nothing for the past, present, or future of the black figure placed there, because the black was wanted at that spot," he was challenging, in that statement so simple as to be self-evident, a whole æsthetics, the æsthetics of the crowd and its

critics. Only Mallarmé, in our time, has rendered so signal a service to art.

iii

"A picture is finished," wrote Whistler, "when all trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared. To say of a picture, as is often said in its praise, that it shows great and earnest labour, is to say that it is incomplete and unfit for view. . . . The work of the Master reeks not of the sweat of the brow—suggests no effort—and is finished from the beginning." In that last phrase, it seems to me, Whistler has said the essential thing, the thing which distinguishes the masterpiece from the experiment. People have said, people still sometimes say, that Whistler's work is slight, and they intimate, because it is slight, it is of little value. The question is, is it finished from the beginning, and has all trace of labour disappeared at the end?

There is a lithograph of Mallarmé, reproduced in the *Vers et Prose*, which, to those who knew him, recalls the actual man as no other portrait does. It is faint, evasive, a mist of lines and spaces that seem like some result of happy accident: "subtiles, éveillées comme l'improvisation et l'inspiration," as Baudelaire said of the Thames etchings. Yet it cost Whistler forty sittings to get this last touch of improvisation into his portrait. He succeeded, but at the cost of what pains? "All trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared," after how formidable, how unrelaxing a labour!

It is the aim of Whistler, as of so much modern art, to be taken at a hint, divined at a gesture, or by telepathy. Mallarmé, suppressing syntax and punctuation, the essential links of

things, sometimes fails in his incantation, and brings before us things homeless and unattached in middle air. Verlaine subtilises words in a song to a mere breathing of music. And so in Whistler there are problems to be guessed, as well as things to be seen. But that is because these exceptional difficult moments of nature, these twilight aspects, these glimpses in which one sees hardly more than a colour, no shape at all, or shapes covered by mist or night, or confused by sunlight, have come to seem to him the only aspects worth caring about. Without "strangeness in its proportion," he can no longer see beauty, but it is the rarity of beauty, always, that he seeks, never a strange thing for the sake of strangeness; so that there is no eccentricity, as there is no display, in his just and reticent records. If he paints artificial light, it is to add a new, strange beauty to natural objects, as night and changing lights really add to them; and he finds astonishing beauties in the fireworks at Cremorne Gardens, in the rockets that fall into the blue waters under Battersea Bridge. They are things beautiful in themselves, or made beautiful by the companionship and co-operation of the night; in a picture they can certainly be as beautiful as stars and sunsets.

Or, take some tiny, scarcely visible sketch in water-colour on tinted paper: it is nothing, and it is enough, for it is a moment of faint colour as satisfying in itself as one of those moments of faint colour which we see come and go in the sky after sunset. No one but Whistler has ever done these things in painting; Verlaine has done the equivalent thing in poetry. They have their brief coloured life like butterflies, and with the same momentary perfection. No one had ever cared to preserve just these aspects, as no one before Verlaine had ever cared to sing certain bird notes.

Each was satisfied when he had achieved the particular, delicate beauty at which he had aimed; neither cared or needed to go on, add the footnote to the text, enclose the commentary within the frame, as most poets and painters are considerate enough to do.

I have quoted Baudelaire, one of the first to recognise the genius of Whistler, as he was one of the first to recognise the genius of Wagner, and another saying of his, spoken of Edgar Poe, comes into my mind, a saying which may, I think, be applied almost equally to Whistler: "Autant certains écrivains affectent l'abandon, visant au chef-d'œuvre les yeux fermés, pleins de confiance dans le désordre, et attendant que les caractères jetés au plafond retombent en poème sur le parquet, autant Edgar Poe,—l'un des hommes les plus inspirés que je connaisse,—a mis d'affectation à cacher la spontanéité, à simuler le sang-froid et la délibération." And, like Poe, it was a combination of beauty and strangeness which Whistler sought in art: "l'étrangeté, qui est comme le condiment indispensable de toute beauté." There is something mysterious in most of his pictures, and the mystery is for the most part indefinable. These fashionable women, drawing on their gloves in the simplest of daily attitudes, these children, standing in the middle of the floor as a child stands to be looked at, these men in black coats, are all thinking thoughts which they hide from us, or repressing sensations which they do not wish us to share. Huysmans has said with his deliberate exaggeration, speaking of the portrait of Miss Alexander: "Ainsi que dans les autres œuvres de M. Whistler, il y a, dans cette toile, un coin supraterrestre, déconcertant. Certes, son personnage est ressemblant, est réel, cela est sûr; certes, il y a, en sus de sa chair, un peu de son caractère dans cette peinture, mais il y a aussi

un côté surnaturel émané de ce peintre mystérieux, un peu spectral, qui justifie, dans une certaine mesure, ce mot de spirite écrit par Desnoyers. L'on ne peut, en effet, lire les révélations plus ou moins véridiques du docteur Crookes sur cette Katie, sur cette ombre incarnée en une forme dédoublée de femme tangible et pourtant fluide, sans songer à ces portraits de femmes de Whistler ; ces portraits-fantomes qui semblent reculer, vouloir s'enfoncer dans le mur, avec leurs yeux énigmatiques et leur bouche d'un rouge glacé, de goule." To say quite that is to add an emphasis to Whistler much too emphatic for his intentions, but how far from the dull insistence of ordinary life, from the unmeaning or deceiving mask which most people present to the world, are these strangely existent, these actual and uncommon people whom he has dreamed on canvas, and they were there! He is the visionary of reality, which he sees with all the vividness of hallucination. And it was alike this characteristic of his temperament and a definite artistic theory of the means to an end, in portrait-painting, which led to the production of perhaps his greatest pictures.

It was one of Whistler's aims in portrait-painting to establish a reasonable balance between the man as he sits in the chair and the image of the man reflected back to you from the canvas. "The one aim," he wrote, "of the unsuspecting painter is to make his man 'stand out' from the frame—never doubting that, on the contrary, he should, and in truth absolutely does, stand *within* the frame—and at a depth behind it equal to the distance at which the painter sees his model. The frame is, indeed, the window through which the painter looks at his model, and nothing could be more offensively inartistic than this brutal attempt to thrust the model on the hither-side of this window!" Here, as always, it was the

just limit of things which Whistler perceived and respected. He never proposed, in a picture, to give you something which you could mistake for reality; but, frankly, a picture, a thing which was emphatically not nature, because it was art.

In Whistler's portraits the pose itself is as much a part of the interpretation as the painting; and the quality of a portrait such as the Sarasate is not to be judged, as it commonly is, by the apparent lack of seriousness in it. M. Boldini's startling portrait of Whistler himself was an example of the art which tries for this common kind of success; there was the likeness, and the shining hat, and as much real artistic sense as is contained in a flash-light. Even in Whistler's portrait of the Comte de Montesquieu, a harlequin of letters, there was no actual harlequinade on the part of the painter, though he may have seemed indulgent to it in his model. How much less is there in the Sarasate, where a genuine artist, but not a profound artist, is seen making his astonishing appearance, violin in hand, out of darkness upon a stage, where he is to be the virtuoso. Sarasate's tone is a miracle, like Melba's, and he added to this miracle of technique a southern fire, which used to go electrically through his audience. He has his temperament and his technique, nothing else. The man who holds the violin in his hands is a child, pleased to please; not a student or a diviner. And Whistler has rendered all this, as truthfully as Watts has rendered the very different problem of Joachim, in perhaps the greatest of his portraits. Joachim is in the act of playing; he bends his brows over the music which he is studying, not reading; if there is any platform or any audience, he is unconscious of them; he is conscious only of Beethoven. Note how Sarasate dandles the violin. It is a child, a jewel.

He is already thinking of the sound, the flawless tone, not of Beethoven. Whistler has caught him, poised him, posed him, another butterfly, and alive. Imagine Sarasate painted by Watts, or indeed in any way but Whistler's! There might have been other great pictures, but no other such interpretation.

To Whistler, unlike Manet, there are many things in the world besides good painting, and the mind which sees through his eyes is not, like Manet's, either "joyful" or "heedless." Unlike most modern painters, Whistler does not fling the truth at you stark naked; he wishes you to know that you are looking at a picture, a work of art, and not at yourself or your neighbour in a mirror. He would feel, I think, that he had failed with you if you did not say: "How beautiful!" before saying "How true!" Nature can take good care of herself, and will give you all the reality you want, whenever you want it; but the way of looking at nature, which is what art has to teach you, or to do in your place, can come only from the artist. Look at this corner of the sea and sand, and then at Whistler's picture of it. How roughly, crudely, imperfectly, uninterestingly, you had seen the thing itself, until the picture taught you how to look. The exact shape of the wave, the exact tints of colouring: had you found them out for yourself? Above all, had you felt them as you feel these lines and colours in the picture? And yet the picture is only a suggestion, a moment out of an unending series of moments; but the moment has been detached by art from that unending and unnoted series, and it gives you the soul of visible things in that miraculous retention of a moment.

Whistler gives you the picture, then, frankly as a picture. He gives it to you for its lines, its colours, as at all events its

primary meaning for him; a meaning in itself almost or quite sufficient, if need be, but capable of an indefinite extension or deepening. Unlike most men, he sees, sees really, with a complete indifference to what other significance things may have, besides their visible aspect.

Only, for him, the visible aspect of things is the aspect of a continual miracle, and it is from this fresh sense of wonder that there comes that mystery in which he envelops mere flesh and blood, in which there is no inherent strangeness. Some aspect of a thing dreamed or seen in passing, and then remembered in the transfiguring memory of the brain, comes hauntingly into all his faces. The look they show you is not the look which their mirror sees every morning and every evening. It has come to them out of the eye that sees them, as it were, for the first time. Until Whistler looked at this young girl's face, it was but a young girl's face; now it is something besides, it means all that the brush has thought into it, it has the weight and meaning and mysterious questioning or a work of art. Every work of art is an interrogation; these faces exist softly, like flowers, delicately on a canvas; they challenge us idly, offering their most secret perfumes if we will but drink them in. They await time in an uneager patience, content to be themselves. They have the flower's assurance, the flower's humility.

Look round a picture gallery, and you will recognise a Whistler at once, and for this reason first, that it does not come to meet you. Most of the other pictures seem to cry across the floor: "Come and look at us, see how like something we are!" Their voices cross and jangle like the voices of rival sellers in a street fair. Each out-bids his neighbour, promising you more than your money's worth. The Whistlers smile secretly in their corner, and say nothing.

They are not really indifferent; they watch and wait, and when you come near them they seem to efface themselves as if they would not have you even see them too closely. That is all part of the subtle malice with which they win you. They choose you, you do not choose them.

One of the first truths of art has needed to be rediscovered in these times, though it has been put into practice by every great artist, and has only been seriously denied by scientific persons and the inept. It has taken new names, and calls itself now "Symbolism," now "Impressionism"; but it has a single thing to say, under many forms: that art must never be a statement, always an evocation. In the art of Whistler there is not so much as a momentary forgetfulness of this truth, and that is why, among many works of greater or less relative merit, he has done nothing, however literally slight, which is not, so far as it goes, done rightly. No picture aims at anything else than being the evocation of a person, a landscape, some colour or contour divined in nature, and interpreted upon canvas or paper. And the real secret of Whistler, I think, is this: that he does not try to catch the accident when an aspect becomes effective, but the instant when it becomes characteristically beautiful.

It is significant of a certain simplicity in his attitude towards his own work, that Whistler, in all his fighting on behalf of principles, has never tried to do more than establish (shall I say?) the correctness of his grammar. He has never asked for more praise than should be the reward of every craftsman who is not a bungler. He has claimed that, setting out to do certain things, legitimate in themselves, he has done them in a way legitimate in itself. All the rest he is content to leave out of the question: that is to say, everything but a few primary qualities, without which no one can, properly speak-

ing, be a painter at all. And, during much of his lifetime, not even this was conceded to him. He wasted a little of his leisure in drawing up a catalogue of some of the blunders of his critics, saying, " Out of their own mouths shall ye judge them." Being without mercy, he called it *The Voice of a People*.

1903, 1905.

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

i

IT was in the summer of 1895 that I first met Aubrey Beardsley. A publisher had asked me to form and edit a new kind of magazine, which was to appeal to the public equally in its letterpress and its illustrations : need I say that I am defining the *Savoy ?* It was, I admit, to have been something of a rival to the *Yellow Book*, which had by that time ceased to mark a movement, and had come to be little more than a publisher's magazine. I forget exactly when the expulsion of Beardsley from the *Yellow Book* had occurred ; it had been sufficiently recent, at all events, to make Beardsley singularly ready to fall in with my project when I went to him and asked him to devote himself to illustrating my quarterly. He was supposed, just then, to be dying ; and as I entered the room, and saw him lying out on a couch, horribly white, I wondered if I had come too late. He was full of ideas, full of enthusiasm, and I think it was then that he suggested the name *Savoy*, finally adopted after endless changes and uncertainties.

A little later we met again at Dieppe, where for a month I saw him daily. It was at Dieppe that the *Savoy* was really planned, and it was in the café, which Mr. Sickert has so often painted, that I wrote the slightly pettish and defiant " Editorial Note," which made so many enemies for the first number.

Dieppe just then was a meeting-place for the younger generation ; some of us spent the whole summer there, lazily but profitably ; others came and went. Beardsley at that time imagined himself to be unable to draw anywhere but in London. He made one or two faint attempts, and even prepared a canvas for a picture which was never painted, in the hospital studio in which M. Jacques Blanche painted the admirable portrait reproduced in the frontispiece. But he found many subjects, some of which he afterwards worked out, in the expressive opportunities of the Casino and the beach. He never walked ; I never saw him look at the sea ; but at night he was almost always to be seen watching the gamblers at *petits chevaux*, studying them with a sort of hypnotised attention for that picture of *The Little Horses*, which was never done. He liked the large, deserted rooms, at hours when no one was there ; the sense of frivolous things caught at a moment of suspended life, *en déshabille*. He would glance occasionally, but with more impatience, at the dances, especially the children's dances, in the concert room ; but he rarely missed a concert, and would glide in every afternoon, and sit on the high benches at the side, always carrying his large, gilt-leather portfolio with the magnificent old, red-lined folio paper, which he would often open, to write some lines in pencil. He was at work then, with an almost pathetic tenacity, at his story, never to be finished, the story which never could have been finished, *Under the Hill*, a new version, a parody (like Laforgue's parodies, but how unlike them, or anything !) of the story of Venus and Tannhäuser. Most of it was done at these concerts, and in the little, close writing-room, where visitors sat writing letters. The fragment published in the first two numbers of the *Savoy* had passed through many stages before it found its way there,

and would have passed through more if it had ever been carried further. Tannhäuser, not quite willingly, had put on Abbé's disguise, and there were other unwilling disguises in those brilliant, disconnected, fantastic pages, in which every sentence was meditated over, written for its own sake, and left to find its way in its own paragraph. It could never have been finished, for it had never really been begun; but what undoubted, singular, literary ability there is in it all the same!

I think Beardsley would rather have been a great writer than a great artist; and I remember, on one occasion, when he had to fill up a form of admission to some library to which I was introducing him, his insistence on describing himself as "man of letters." At one time he was going to write an essay on *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, at another he had planned a book on Rousseau. But his plans for writing changed even more quickly than his plans for doing drawings, and with less profitable results in the meantime. He has left no prose except that fragment of a story; and in verse only the three pieces published in the *Savoy*. Here, too, he was terribly anxious to excel; and his patience over a medium so unfamiliar, and hence so difficult, to him as verse, was infinite. We spent two whole days on the grassy ramparts of the old castle at Arques-la-Bataille, near Dieppe; I working at something or other in one part, he working at *The Three Musicians* in another. The eight stanzas of that amusing piece of verse are really, in their own way, a *tour de force;* by sheer power of will, by deliberately saying to himself, "I will write a poem," and by working with such strenuous application that at last a certain result, the kind of result he had willed, did really come about, he succeeded in doing what he had certainly no natural aptitude for doing. How far was that

more genuine aspect of his genius also an " infinite capacity for taking pains " ?

It was on the balcony of the Hôtel Henri IV. at Arques, one of those September evenings, that I had the only quite serious, almost solemn, conversation I ever had with Beardsley. Not long before we had gone together to visit Alexandre Dumas *fils* at Puy, and it was from talking thoughtfully, but entirely, of that Parisian writer, and his touching, in its unreal way so real, *Dame aux Camélias* (the novel, not the play), which Beardsley admired so much, that we passed into an unexpectedly intimate mood of speculation. Those stars up yonder, whether they were really the imprisoning worlds of other creatures like ourselves ; the strange ways by which the soul might have come and must certainly go ; death, and the future : it was of such things that I found him speaking, for once without mockery. And he told me then a singular dream or vision which he had had when a child, waking up at night in the moonlight and seeing a great crucifix, with a bleeding Christ, falling off the wall, where certainly there was not, and had never been, any crucifix. It is only by remembering that one conversation, that vision, the tone of awe with which he told it, that I can, with a great effort, imagine to myself the Beardsley whom I knew, with his so positive intelligence, his imaginative sight of the very spirit of man as a thing of definite outline, transformed finally into the Beardsley who died in the peace of the last sacraments of the Church, holding the rosary between his fingers.

ii

Anima naturaliter pagana, Aubrey Beardsley ended a long career, at the age of twenty-six, in the arms of the Church. No artist of our time, none certainly whose work has been in

black and white, has reached a more universal, or a more contested fame; none has formed for himself, out of such alien elements, a more personal originality of manner; none has had so wide an influence on contemporary art. He had the fatal speed of those who are to die young; that disquieting completeness and extent of knowledge, that absorption of a lifetime in an hour, which we find in those who hasten to have done their work before noon, knowing that they will not see the evening. He had played the piano in drawing-rooms as an infant prodigy, before, I suppose, he had ever drawn a line; famous at twenty as a draughtsman, he found time, in those incredibly busy years which remained to him, deliberately to train himself into a writer of prose which was, in its way, as original as his draughtsmanship, and into a writer of verse which had at least ingenious and original moments. He seemed to have read everything, and had his preferences as adroitly in order, as wittily in evidence, as almost any man of letters; indeed, he seemed to know more, and was a sounder critic, of books than of pictures; with perhaps a deeper feeling for music than for either. His conversation had a peculiar kind of brilliance, different in order but scarcely inferior in quality to that of any other contemporary master of that art; a salt, whimsical dogmatism, equally full of convinced egoism and of imperturbable keen-sightedness. Generally choosing to be paradoxical, and vehement on behalf of any enthusiasm of the mind, he was the dupe of none of his own statements, or indeed of his own enthusiasms, and, really, very coldly impartial. I scarcely except even his own judgment of himself, in spite of his petulant, amusing self-assertion, so full of the childishness of genius. He thought, and was right in thinking, very highly of himself; he admired himself

enormously ; but his intellect would never allow itself to be deceived even about his own accomplishments.

This clear, unemotional intellect, emotional only in the perhaps highest sense, where emotion almost ceases to be recognisable, in the abstract, for ideas, for lines, left him, with all his interests in life, with all his sociability, of a sort, essentially very lonely. Many people were devoted to him, but he had, I think, scarcely a friend, in the fullest sense of the word ; and I doubt if there were more than one or two people for whom he felt any real affection. In spite of constant ill-health, he had an astonishing tranquillity of nerves ; and it was doubtless that rare quality which kept him, after all, alive so long. How far he had deliberately acquired command over his nerves and his emotions, as he deliberately acquired command over his brain and hand, I do not know. But there it certainly was, one of the bewildering characteristics of so contradictorya temperament.

One of his poses, as people say, one of those things, that is, in which he was most sincere, was his care in outwardly conforming to the conventions which make for elegance and restraint ; his necessity of dressing well, of showing no sign of the professional artist. He had a great contempt for, what seemed to inferior craftsmen, inspiration, for what I have elsewhere called the plenary inspiration of first thoughts ; and he hated the outward and visible signs of an inward yeastiness and incoherency. It amused him to denounce everything, certainly, which Baudelaire would have denounced ; and, along with some mere *gaminerie*, there was a very serious and adequate theory of art at the back of all his destructive criticisms. It was a profound thing which he said to a friend of mine who asked him whether he ever saw visions : " No," he replied, " I do not allow

myself to see them except on paper." All his art is in that phrase.

And he attained, to the full, one certainly of his many desires, and that one, perhaps, of which he was most keenly or most continuously conscious: contemporary fame, the fame of a popular singer or a professional beauty, the fame of Yvette Guilbert or of Cléo de Mérode. And there was logic in his insistence on this point, in his eagerness after immediate and clamorous success. Others might have waited; he knew that he had not the time to wait. After all, posthumous fame is not a very cheering prospect to look forward to on the part of those who have worked without recompense, if the pleasure or the relief of work is not enough in itself. Every artist has his own secret, beyond the obvious one, of why he works. So far as it is not the mere need of earning one's living, it is generally some unhappiness, some dissatisfaction with the things about one, some too desperate or too contemptuous sense of the meaning of existence. At one period of his life a man works at his art to please a woman; then he works because he has not pleased the woman; and then because he is tired of pleasing her. Work for the work's sake it always must be, in a profound sense; and with Beardsley, not less certainly than with Blake or with Rossetti. But that other, that accidental, insidious, significant motive, was, with Beardsley, the desire to fill his few working years with the immediate echo of a great notoriety.

Like most artists who have thought much of popularity, he had an immense contempt for the public; and the desire to kick that public into admiration, and then to kick it for admiring the wrong thing or not knowing why it was admiring, led him into many of his most outrageous practical jokes of the pen. He was partly right and partly wrong, for

he was indiscriminate ; and to be indiscriminate is always to be partly right and partly wrong. The wish to *épater le bourgeois* is a natural one, and, though a little beside the question, does not necessarily lead one astray. The general public, of course, does not in the least know why it admires the right thing to-day though it admired the wrong thing yesterday. But there is such a thing as denying your Master while you are rebuking a servant-girl. Beardsley was without the very sense of respect ; it was one of his limitations.

And this limitation was an unfortunate one, for it limited his ambition. With the power of creating beauty, which should be pure beauty, he turned aside, only too often, to that lower kind of beauty which is the mere beauty of technique, in a composition otherwise meaningless, trivial, or grotesque. Saying to himself, " I can do what I like ; there is nothing I could not do if I chose to, if I chose to take the trouble ; but why should I offer hard gold when an I.O.U. will be just the same ? I can pay up whenever the money is really wanted," he allowed himself to be content with what he knew would startle, doing it with infinite pains, to his own mind conscientiously, but doing it with that lack of reverence for great work which is one of the most sterilising characteristics of the present day.

The epithet *fin de siècle* has been given, somewhat loosely, to a great deal of modern French art, and to art which, in one way or another, seems to attach itself to contemporary France. Out of the great art of Manet, the serious art of Degas, the exquisite art of Whistler, all, in such different ways, so modern, there has come into existence a new, very modern, very far from great or serious or really exquisite kind of art, which has expressed itself largely in the *Courrier Français*, the *Gil Blas illustré*, and the posters. All this

art may be said to be, what the quite new art of the poster certainly is, art meant for the street, for people who are walking fast. It comes into competition with the newspapers, with the music halls; half contemptuously, it popularises itself; and, with real qualities and a real measure of good intention, finds itself forced to seek for sharp, sudden, arresting means of expression. Instead of seeking pure beauty, the seriousness and self-absorption of great art, it takes, wilfully and for effect, that beauty which is least evident, indeed least genuine; nearest to ugliness in the grotesque, nearest to triviality in a certain elegant daintiness, nearest also to brutality and the spectacular vices. Art is not sought for its own sake, but the manual craftsman perfects himself to express a fanciful, ingenious, elaborate, somewhat tricky way of seeing things, which he has deliberately adopted. It finds its own in the eighteenth century, so that Willette becomes a kind of petty, witty Watteau of Montmartre; it parodies the art of stained glass, with Grasset and his followers; it juggles with iron bars and masses of shadow, like Lautrec. And in its direct assault on the nerves, it pushes naughtiness to obscenity, deforms observation into caricature, dexterity of line and handling being cultivated as one cultivates a particular, deadly *botte* in fencing.

And this art, this art of the day and hour, competes not merely with the appeal and the popularity of the theatrical spectacle, but directly with theatrical methods, the methods of stage illusion. The art of the ballet counts for much in the evolution of many favourite effects of contemporary drawing, and not merely because Degas has drawn dancers, with his reserved, essentially classical mastery of form. By its rapidity of flight within bounds, by its bird-like and

flower-like caprices of colour and motion, by that appeal to the imagination which comes from its silence (to which music is but like an accompanying shadow, so closely, so discreetly, does it follow the feet of the dancers), by its appeal to the eyes and to the senses, its adorable artificiality, the ballet has tempted almost every draughtsman, as the interiors of music-halls have also been singularly tempting, with their extraordinary tricks of light, their suddenness of gesture, their triumphant tinsel, their fantastic humanity. And pantomime, too, in the French and correct, rather than in the English and incorrect, sense of that word, has had its significant influence. In those pathetic gaieties of Willette, in the windy laughter of the frivolities of Chéret, it is the masquerade, the English clown or acrobat seen at the Folies-Bergère, painted people mimicking puppets, who have begotten this masquerading humanity of posters and illustrated papers. And the point of view is the point of view of Pierrot :

le subtil génie
De sa malice infinie
De poète-grimacier—

Verlaine's *Pierrot gamin.*

Pierrot is one of the types of our century, of the moment in which we live, or of the moment, perhaps, out of which we are just passing. Pierrot is passionate ; but he does not believe in great passions. He feels himself to be sickening with a fever, or else perilously convalescent ; for love is a disease, which he is too weak to resist or endure. He has worn his heart on his sleeve so long, that it has hardened in the cold air. He knows that his face is powdered, and if he sobs, it is without tears ; and it is hard to distinguish, under

the chalk, if the grimace which twists his mouth awry is more laughter or mockery. He knows that he is condemned to be always in public, that emotion would be supremely out of keeping with his costume, that he must remember to be fantastic if he would not be merely ridiculous. And so he becomes exquisitely false, dreading above all things that " one touch of nature " which would ruffle his disguise, and leave him defenceless. Simplicity, in him, being the most laughable thing in the world, he becomes learned, perverse, intellectualising his pleasure, brutalising his intellect ; his mournful contemplation of things becoming a kind of grotesque joy, which he expresses in the only symbols at his command, tracing his Giotto's O with the elegance of his pirouette.

And Beardsley, with almost more than the Parisian's deference to Paris, and to the moment, was, more than any Parisian, this *Pierrot gamin*. He was more than that, but he was that : to be that was part of what he learnt from France. It helped him to the pose which helped him to reveal himself ; as Burne-Jones had helped him when he did the illustrations to the *Morte d'Arthur*, as Japanese art helped him to free himself from that influence, as Eisen and Saint-Aubin showed him the way to the *Rape of the Lock*. He had that originality which surrenders to every influence, yet surrenders to absorb, not to be absorbed ; that originality which, constantly shifting, is true always to its centre. Whether he learnt from M. Grasset or from Mr. Ricketts, from an 1830 fashion-plate, or from an engraved plate by Hogarth, whether the scenery of Arques-la-Bataille composed itself into a pattern in his mind, or, in the Casino at Dieppe, he made a note of the design of a looped-up window-blind, he was always drawing to himself, out of the order of art or the confusion of natural things, the thing he wanted, the

thing he could make his own. And he found, in the French art of the moment, a joyous sadness, the service to God of Mephistopheles, which his own temperament and circumstances were waiting to suggest to him.

"In more ways than one do men sacrifice to the rebellious angels," says St. Augustine; and Beardsley's sacrifice, together with that of all great decadent art, the art of Rops or the art of Baudelaire, is really a sacrifice to the eternal beauty, and only seemingly to the powers of evil. And here let me say that I have no concern with what neither he nor I could have had absolute knowledge of, his own intention in his work. A man's intention, it must be remembered, from the very fact that it is conscious, is much less intimately himself than the sentiment which his work conveys to me. So large is the sub-conscious element in all artistic creation, that I should have doubted whether Beardsley himself knew what he intended to do, in this or that really significant drawing. Admitting that he could tell exactly what he had intended, I should be quite prepared to show that he had really done the very contrary. Thus when I say that he was a profoundly spiritual artist, though seeming to care chiefly for the manual part of his work; that he expressed evil with an intensity which lifted it into a region almost of asceticism, though attempting, not seldom, little more than a joke or caprice in line; and that he was above all, though almost against his own will, a satirist, a satirist who has seen the ideal, —I am putting forward no paradox, nothing really contradictory, but a simple analysis of the work as it exists.

At times he attains pure beauty, has the unimpaired vision; in the best of the *Salome* designs, here and there afterwards. From the first it is a diabolic beauty, but it is not yet divided against itself. The consciousness of sin is always there,

but it is sin first transfigured by beauty, and then disclosed by beauty; sin, conscious of itself, of its inability to escape itself, and showing in its ugliness the law it has broken. His world is a world of phantoms, in whom the desire of the perfecting of mortal sensations, a desire of infinity, has overpassed mortal limits, and poised them, so faint, so quivering, so passionate for flight, in a hopeless and strenuous immobility. They have the sensitiveness of the spirit, and that bodily sensitiveness which wastes their veins and imprisons them in the attitude of their luxurious meditation. They are too thoughtful to be ever really simple, or really absorbed by either flesh or spirit. They have nothing of what is "healthy" or merely "animal" in their downward course towards repentance; no overwhelming passion hurries them beyond themselves; they do not capitulate to an open assault of the enemy of souls. It is the soul in them that sins, sorrowfully, without reluctance, inevitably. Their bodies are faint and eager with wantonness; they desire more pleasure than there is in the world, fiercer and more exquisite pains, a more intolerable suspense. They have put off the common burdens of humanity, and put on that loneliness which is the rest of saints and the unrest of those who have sinned with the intellect. They are a little lower than the angels, and they walk between these and the fallen angels, without part or lot in the world.

Here, then, we have a sort of abstract spiritual corruption, revealed in beautiful form; sin transfigured by beauty. And here, even if we go no further, is an art intensely spiritual, an art in which evil purifies itself by its own intensity, and by the beauty which transfigures it. The one thing in the world which is without hope is that mediocrity which is the sluggish content of inert matter. Better be vividly awake to evil

than, in mere somnolence, close the very issues and approaches of good and evil. For evil itself, carried to the point of a perverse ecstasy, becomes a kind of good, by means of that energy which, otherwise directed, is virtue ; and which can never, no matter how its course may be changed, fail to retain something of its original efficacy. The devil is nearer to God, by the whole height from which he fell, than the average man who has not recognised his own need to rejoice or to repent. And so a profound spiritual corruption, instead of being a more " immoral " thing than the gross and pestiferous humanity of Hogarth or of Rowlandson, is more nearly, in the final and abstract sense, moral, for it is the triumph of the spirit over the flesh, to no matter what end. It is a form of divine possession, by which the inactive and materialising soul is set in fiery motion, lured from the ground, into at least a certain high liberty. And so we find evil justified of itself, and an art consecrated to the revelation of evil equally justified ; its final justification being that declared by Plotinus, in his treatise *On the Nature of Good and Evil* : " But evil is permitted to remain by itself alone on account of the superior power and nature of good ; because it appears from necessity everywhere comprehended and bound, in beautiful bands, like men fettered with golden chains, lest it should be produced openly to the view of divinity, or lest mankind should always behold its horrid shape when perfectly naked ; and such is the supervening power of good, that whenever a glimpse of perfect evil is obtained we are immediately recalled to the memory of good by the image of the beautiful with which evil is invested."

In those drawings of Beardsley which are grotesque rather than beautiful, in which lines begin to grow deformed, the pattern, in which now all the beauty takes refuge, is itself

a moral judgment. Look at that drawing called *The Scarlet Pastorale*. In front, a bloated harlequin struts close to the footlights, outside the play, on which he turns his back; beyond, sacramental candles have been lighted, and are guttering down in solitude, under an unseen wind. And between, on the sheer darkness of the stage, a bald and plumed Pierrot, holding in his vast, collapsing paunch with a mere rope of roses, shows the cloven foot, while Pierrette points at him in screaming horror, and the fat dancer turns on her toes indifferently. Need we go further to show how much more than Gautier's meaning lies in the old paradox of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, that "perfection of line is virtue"? That line which rounds the deformity of the cloven-footed sin, the line itself, is at once the revelation and the condemnation of vice, for it is part of that artistic logic which is morality.

Beardsley is the satirist of an age without convictions, and he can but paint hell as Baudelaire did, without pointing for contrast to any contemporary paradise. He employs the same rhetoric as Baudelaire, a method of emphasis which it is uncritical to think insincere. In that terrible annunciation of evil which he called *The Mysterious Rose-Garden*, the lantern-bearing angel with winged sandals whispers, from among the falling roses, tidings of more than "pleasant sins." The leering dwarfs, the "monkeys," by which the mystics symbolised the earthlier vices; those immense bodies swollen with the lees of pleasure, and those cloaked and masked desires shuddering in gardens and smiling ambiguously at interminable toilets; are part of a symbolism which loses nothing by lack of emphasis. And the peculiar efficacy of this satire is that it is so much the satire of desire returning upon itself, the mockery of desire enjoyed, the mockery

of desire denied. It is because he loves beauty that beauty's degradation obsesses him; it is because he is supremely conscious of virtue that vice has power to lay hold upon him. And, unlike those other, acceptable satirists of our day, with whom satire exhausts itself in the rebuke of a drunkard leaning against a lamp-post, or a lady paying the wrong compliment in a drawing-room, he is the satirist of essential things; it is always the soul, and not the body's discontent only, which cries out of these insatiable eyes, that have looked on all their lusts, and out of these bitter mouths, that have eaten the dust of all their sweetnesses, and out of these hands, that have laboured delicately for nothing, and out of these feet, that have run after vanities. They are so sorrowful because they have seen beauty, and because they have departed from the line of beauty.

And after all, the secret of Beardsley is there; in the line itself rather than in anything, intellectually realised, which the line is intended to express. With Beardsley everything was a question of form: his interest in his work began when the paper was before him and the pen in his hand. And so, in one sense, he may be said never to have known what he wanted to do, while in another, he knew very precisely indeed. He was ready to do, within certain limits, almost anything you suggested to him; as, when left to himself, he was content to follow the caprice of the moment. What he was sure of, was his power of doing exactly what he proposed to himself to do; the thing itself might be *Salome* or *Belinda*, *Ali Baba* or *Rejane*, the *Morte d'Arthur* or the *Rhinegold* or the *Liaisons Dangereuses*; the design might be for an edition of a classic or for the cover of a catalogue of second-hand books. And the design might seem to have no relation with the title of its subject, and indeed, might have none; its relation was

of line to line within the limits of its own border, and to nothing else in the world. Thus he could change his whole manner of working five or six times over in the course of as many years, seem to employ himself much of the time on trivial subjects, and yet retain, almost unimpaired, an originality which consisted in the extreme beauty and the absolute certainty of design.

It was a common error, at one time, to say that Beardsley could not draw. He certainly did not draw the human body with any attempt at rendering its own lines, taken by themselves ; indeed, one of his latest drawings, an initial letter to *Volpone*, is almost the first in which he has drawn a nude figure realistically. But he could draw, with extraordinary skill, in what is after all the essential way : he could make a line do what he wanted it to do, express the conception of form which it was his intention to express ; and this is what the conventional draughtsman, Bourguereau, for instance, cannot do. The conventional draughtsman, any Academy student, will draw a line which shows quite accurately the curve of a human body, but all his science of drawing will not make you feel that line, will not make that line pathetic, as in the little, drooping body which a satyr and Pierrot are laying in a puff-powder coffin, in the tailpiece to *Salome*.

And then, it must never be forgotten, Beardsley was a decorative artist, and not anything else. From almost the very first he accepted convention ; he set himself to see things as pattern. Taking freely all that the Japanese could give him, that release from the bondage of what we call real things, which comes to one man from an intense spirituality, to another from a consciousness of material form so intense that it becomes abstract, he made the world over again in his head, as if it existed only when it was thus re-made, and not even

then, until it had been set down in black line on a white surface, in white line on a black surface. Working, as the decorative artist must work, in symbols almost as arbitrary, almost as fixed, as the squares of a chessboard, he swept together into his pattern all the incongruous things in the world, weaving them into congruity by his pattern. Using the puff-box, the toilet-table, the ostrich-feather hat, with a full consciousness of their suggestive quality in a drawing of archaic times, a drawing purposely fantastic, he put these things to beautiful uses, because he liked their forms, and because his space of white or black seemed to require some such arrangement of lines. They were the minims and crotchets by which he wrote down his music ; they made the music, but they were not the music.

In the *Salome* drawings, in most of the *Yellow Book* drawings, we see Beardsley under this mainly Japanese influence ; with, now and later, in his less serious work, the but half-admitted influence of what was most actual, perhaps most temporary, in the French art of the day. *Pierrot gamin*, in *Salome* itself, alternates, in such irreverences as the design of *The Black Cape*, with the creator of noble lines, in the austere and terrible design of *The Dancer's Reward*, the ornate and vehement design of *The Peacock Skirt*. Here we get pure outline, as in the frontispiece ; a mysterious intricacy, as in the border of the title-page and of the table of contents ; a paradoxical beauty of mere wilfulness, but a wilfulness which has its meaning, its excuse, its pictorial justification, as in *The Toilette*. *The Yellow Book* embroiders upon the same manner ; but in the interval between the last drawings for the *Yellow Book* and the first drawings for the *Savoy*, a new influence has come into the work, the influence of the French eighteenth century. This influence, artificial as it is, draws

him nearer, though somewhat unquietly nearer, to nature. Drawings like *The Fruit Bearers*, in the first number of the *Savoy*, with its solid and elaborate richness of ornament, or *The Coiffing*, in the third number, with its delicate and elaborate grace, its witty concentration of line; drawings like the illustrations to the *Rape of the Lock*, have, with less extravagance, and also a less strenuous intellectual effort, a new mastery of elegant form, not too far removed from nature while still subordinated to the effect of decoration, to the instinct of line. In the illustrations to Mr. Ernest Dowson's *Pierrot of the Minute*, we have a more deliberate surrender, for the moment, to Eisen and Saint-Aubin, as yet another manner is seen working itself out. The illustrations, as yet unpublished, to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, seemed to me, when I first saw them, with the exception of one extremely beautiful design in colour, to show a certain falling off in power, an actual weakness in the handling of the pen. But, in their not quite successful feeling after natural form, they did but represent, as I afterwards found, the moment of transition to what must now remain for us, and may well remain, Beardsley's latest manner. The four initial letters to *Volpone*, the last of which was finished not more than three weeks before his death, have a new quality both of hand and of mind. They are done in pencil, and they lose, as such drawings are bound to lose, very greatly in the reduced reproduction. But, in the original, they are certainly, in sheer technical skill, equal to anything he had ever done, and they bring at the last, and with complete success, nature itself into the pattern. And here, under some solemn influence, the broken line of beauty has reunited; "the care is over," and the trouble has gone out of this no less fantastic world, in which Pan still smiles from his terminal column

among the trees, but without the old malice. Human and animal form reassert themselves, with a new dignity, under this new respect for their capabilities. Beardsley has accepted the convention of nature itself, turning it to his own use, extracting from it his own symbols, but no longer rejecting it for a convention entirely of his own making. And thus in his last work, done under the very shadow of death, we find new possibilities for an art, conceived as pure line, conducted through mere pattern, which, after many hesitations, has resolved finally upon the great compromise, that compromise which the greatest artists have made, between the mind's outline and the outline of visible things.

1898.

CATHEDRALS

i

CANTERBURY AND COLOGNE

I CAN never realise that Cologne Cathedral was meant to be Catholic, or was built for a nation then Catholic. It has the chilliness of Protestantism, all the colour scraped off the visible world ; an inspiration, undoubtedly, but towards a colourless height in heaven. The whole structure aspires, not only when seen from without, with its multitude of straight, thin lines, its climbing spires, but inside also, in those slender columns, each with its sheaf of reeds or roods, and especially in the tall, rounded arch just inside the main entrance, which is like a thin and lofty door in a mountain, admitting one to some hidden regions. Here this exquisite door admits one only to a sort of emptiness, a vast nakedness of space, frugal and fruitless, out of which nothing grows, in the luxuriant way of the great French Gothic cathedrals.

Seen from outside, there is indeed an appearance of unity, a creation of mind in stone. Everywhere is one inflexible pattern, repeated, magnified, contracted ; every detail seems to balance every other detail. But no ! for the balance, if you look carefully, is not everywhere preserved. Those half-windows, which are fitted into the pattern because there is no room for the whole of the windows, and which are

seen inside with their missing half parodied in stone, are they not a failure to balance perfectly, a kind of Procrustes treatment of material? And is any even of the exterior detail really good? Are not the figures a little ready-made, the ornamentation a little characterless? It all tends to the general effect, it is true; and, seen at sufficient distance, that effect is, in its own way, incomparable. Even then, would one not gladly give this overpowering, coldly impressive structure for one of those small old churches without an ornament, the eleventh century Santa Maria in Capitol, or St. Martinus down by the Rhine? as one would prefer a breathing fragment of folk-song:

O waly, waly, but love be bonnie,
A little while when it is new;
But when 'tis old, it waxes cold,
An' fades away like morning dew.
But had I wist before I kissed
That love had been sae ill to win,
I had locked my heart in a case o' gowd
And pinned it wi' a siller pin:

that, coming up like a flower, to the calm intellectual energy of Dryden's *Song for St. Cecilia's Day*.

Inside, the decoration is somewhat less negligible, and it is for the most part stuck on, and adheres frigidly. If the Cathedral has something in common with Bach's bare stonework in music, its ornamentation is certainly his also, with its harpsichord trills and Italian flourishes. In decorating these sober walls, pillars, and windows, the German is seen trying to come out of his native Protestantism of mind, to unthaw a little, and to accept life in the spirit of art; to be

not only idealistic, but sensuous as well. He fails, and does but prettify his severity.

Yes, in all this there is the Protestant appeal of "pure reason." Mystery no longer envelops the sacred rites; there is no shadow from divine things; here is a daylight church through which the air blows freely. If there is any mysticism built up into these stones, it is the icy Flemish mysticism of Ruysbroeck, whose name one sees on a station not far from Cologne. "How reasonable is God!" one says, sitting here among these cold, ascending pillars; and not, as in Chartres or Barcelona, in that dimness touched with fire: "How terrible is God!" This cathedral is one of the unconsoling images of eternity, as of an even going on of things for ever, in a perpetuation of what is level, tedious, unbroken in time. I can find in it neither ecstasy nor any passionate kind of hope. It shelters no dreams, only a calm certainty, as of a mind which has reasoned itself sure.

Canterbury Cathedral is a palace made for God, with that "exuberance which is beauty." Originally, we are told, a literal palace, Athelstan's, and given up by the king to Augustine and his monks, it has still its broad grip on the earth, and with corners in it for all the curiosities of the senses, in their dedication to the divine use. Age has added itself to age with but little sense of things added; we see a nation in growth, from creeping strength of the Saxon, through the resolute strength of the Norman, onward to an over-conscious energy, and, indeed, finally, to our own uncreative time. As you walk away from the remodelled west door, and follow the long line of the building, you will see neither repetition nor want of balance, but an exuberant amplitude, giving birth to incessantly renewed forms of beauty. It is a living thing, which seems to develop in some

incalculable organic growth. There is vastness and warmth, a solidity which is infinitely various, yet without caprice. Here we have none of the reticences and formalities of mere mind in stone as in Cologne Cathedral ; what we have here is properly soul in stone, with all the beauty which the soul can form in its minister, the body, as it creates outwards in its own image. The sense of a rich and sober intricacy, which we get from the whole structure, satisfies far more than the Protestant, or reasonable, worship of God. Inside, in that uninteresting nave, which reminds one for a moment of Cologne, we get indeed something of the Protestant chilliness ; but with the choir and side-chapels warmth returns, and, as we go down into the crypt, we find again that amplitude, that severe richness, which the outside had shown us. There is the same growth, the same vital expansion, as the great church sends its roots down into the earth, burrowing there, and branching this way and that.

The crypt is the work of gnomes, or of giants of the underearth, and it reminds me, in its huge, heavy, subterranean beauty, of the buried cistern of Yeri-Batan-Serai at Constantinople. The Normans built like soldiers, making citadels, but with a large, immovable sense of proportion, and an unswerving sureness in their strokes of the axe, like unerring blows in fight. Outside, in the Norman tower, with its delicate precision of not too rigid pattern, its rich and exquisite severity, and in the porch and staircase leading to the pilgrims' hall, we see to what elegance that hard strength could refine itself. But in the crypt there is only force, and the solemn playfulness of force in its childhood.

In Canterbury Cathedral there are many separable beauties : the thirteenth century windows, with their sombre purple, their naïve drama of miracles and parables ; the fifteenth

century cloisters, the aisles of a stone forest, in which the branches meet and intertwine overhead; the high, wintry tower of Bell Harry, on which time and weather have worked to better purpose than the "new brushes" with which the inside of the nave and choir are scrubbed down four times a year. But where I find the fundamental contrast with Cologne is precisely in the whole temper which I would call genius, of the building itself, in contrast with the careful and persistent talent of the builders of Cologne. These followed a pattern, century after century, and they have left a problem solved. In the English cathedral I find what cannot be made to order, an instinct, the instinct of age after age, bringing its own qualities, letting accident have its way with things, and yet never losing that essential harmony, which is really a kind of soul, not a pattern.

ii

OUR LADY OF AMIENS

Within and without, the Cathedral church of Our Lady of Amiens is like a precious casket, adorned for some priceless jewel. Every part has the finish of a miniature, and there is something actually dainty in this vast church, in which a singular precision in its proportions never becomes a mechanical regularity, is never cold, but retains always the heat of that first "excitement" out of which it was first created. "The pointed style at Amiens," says Pater subtly, "is full of excitement." Here, in the construction of what is certainly "l'église ogivale par excellence," unity has been attained without any of those losses or compromises by which that quality is too often sought at the expense of

exuberance, an ample vitality. The façade is set up against the sky like a great frontispiece of images to a printed book, the book which Ruskin has called the Bible of Amiens. It is an immense stone page, as if engraved on the sky, and it is at once severe and sumptuous. It is alive with rich ornament, full of grandeur, and with a kind of heavy sweetness in its almost tropical stone vegetation. At the sides and back, flying buttresses leap out and seem to cross in the air, among those long straight pillars (one might almost call them) that are all the wall between window and window; and these narrow strips of wall and these slender buttresses are full of nervous elegance. The front, too, has daintiness, in its exuberance of vitality, tempered to a pattern, and yet seeming as spontaneous as a caprice. It is as if the plan had been living from its first sketch in the brain of Robert de Luzarches, and had grown organically, statues, reliefs, ornaments all coming into their places alive already. Inside, we see the Pointed Gothic in its supreme elegance. The whole church gives itself to you from every point, opens to the eye as it is open to the light. There is an immense cheerfulness in this daylight church, itself so warm with light, the white stone as if just a little browned by the sun. It is a daylight church in a way very different from that of Cologne. Here it is not abstract reason to which a chilly light bears witness, but rather the whole temple, alive with natural life in its very lines, its coils of stone flowers that link pillar to pillar in an unbroken garland, lies open to God, without reticence, grateful for existence. The slender columns go up in straight thin lines, widely spaced, with great breadths of clear windows between column and column. The roof of the transept is nearly as high as the roof of the nave, and its groinings, seen through the pointed arches as you walk, transpose themselves

into a series of delicate patterns, full of refreshing and not surprising novelty. There is but little decoration, but, in that decoration, every touch is a refining of some structural line, a clothing of some nakedness of space. You are conscious of nothing but symmetry, and of that calm, delighted sense of satisfaction which symmetry brings with it; and then, little by little, you distinguish, with increasing pleasure, many separate and always subsidiary beauties.

Among these, nothing is more curious than the painted stone carvings on the walls of the choir. Those on the south side, done in the sixteenth century, and with a fine dramatic sense of movement and grouping, are far less interesting than the fifteenth century scenes from the life and death of John the Baptist, on the north side. The painting is mostly in golds and reds and blues, now dulled to a finer than their original colour. There is always an elaborate background of turreted castles, with people looking out of the windows; people sitting at table, the cloth falling in stiff folds, the loaf of bread, the plates on the table. The last three divisions represent the dance of the daughter of Herodias, with fine invention. In the first Salome has just ended her dance; Herod and Herodias sit at the table behind her, and she stands, fingering a long curl, smiling and as yet unconscious, indifferent; a dainty, naïve little person, like the Salome of Lucas Cranach, cruel through indifference; and she catches sight of a man bringing a dish to the table; he has something on a platter, and she says, "Give me presently the head of John the Baptist, on a platter." By her side a monkey, squatting on the ground, looks up at her with a pained, half lascivious leer. She wears a girdle from which a heavy chain falls down the front of her gold-flowered

dress; the blue lining is seen as she lifts it coquettishly. In the second division you see John beheaded, the red veins of the neck fallen forward where the head has been severed. Salome stands by quietly, waiting; but already consciousness of what she has done begins to come into her face, as the headsman, looking at her queerly, like the monkey, in another interrogation, sets the head down on the platter which she holds in her hands. In the third, Herod and Herodias sit at table, with the head before them on a platter, and Herodias thrusts a knife into the forehead above the left eye. In the foreground Salome faints, falling aside as if overpowered with some physical terror, and you would scarcely recognise her changed face, but for the ornaments beside the ears and the chains about the neck. Her fingers, as her hands hang, are rigid; in her convulsed face, lines like old age tighten her plump chin into the fixed wrinkles of an old woman, and her smooth forehead is drawn upward into a deep furrow by the movement which sets her blue eyes horribly wide open. This naïf sculptor has rendered his legend, not as a legend, but as a piece of actual drama, and with a subtle psychology.

And throughout, in all the sculpture of the exterior, there is an astonishing sense of reality, to which beauty comes by accident, or inevitably, in the attempt to render life. In the life-sized figures along the façade the aim is always at character. The drapery is generalised, but not the face, which has always something to say, some solemn or smiling message in its rough-hewn, as if ascetic lines. And they say distinctly what they wish to say, these sculptors, not distracted by more than a single intention, knowing very well how to express an emotion or render an attitude.

Lower than these statues, running round the entire base

of the front, and following the curve of each doorway, there is a double row of quatrefoils, each containing a little scene out of the Bible ; and the perfectly sure and successful art with which they are done is a form of art which survives to-day only in children's toys. They were addressed to similar spectators, and they have the same quaint faithfulness to a child's sense of reality. One sees Jonah as he steps comfortably out of the whale's widely opened mouth and plants his foot firmly on its back in the midst of the sea ; one sees the good man sitting under his own vine and fig-tree ; people at work, dancing, embracing, rowing, building, lying in bed ; and the lamps hang over the bed, the boots are laid neatly on the floor : nothing that would be really seen there is forgotten in this faithful setting down of what must have happened. The animals, a delicious hedgehog, apes, a crab, are done quite literally after nature ; and there are all sorts of quaint symbols, as like nature as they can be, such as the water which is poured out of a vessel in solid trickles of wavy lines, that reach the ground and turn there.

And in the grotesques, which writhe over the entire front, and are seen close at hand under each of the full-length statues about the doorways, I find the easy, successful, because simple and truthful, achievement of what the Germans have tried and failed to do in their grotesque art. Each is conceived as the tortured evil chafing against the virtue which he is condemned to support, and each monster in pain has his natural unexaggerated movement : the movement to get away, to lift up the weight above him, to at least wriggle forward and look up. They are the flesh and the devil, kept under by the saints, but, none the less, with their place and form in the world, of which this church is an epitome. And it is with a fine, significant sense of imaginative design

that the builder of this the greatest house made with hands has set, high up, at the edge of a parapet, a row of winged monsters, leaning over like great carrion birds that have swooped down there in their flight across space.

iii

ST. ÉTIENNE OF BOURGES

In Bourges, a little white town of turning streets, heavy with quiet, set in the midst of broad and fertile plains, everything is old, subdued, placidly and venerably provincial. It has the settled repose of an old cathedral city; streets without noise, windows open against the light, everywhere little open squares, little formal gardens, over which the tree-tops almost meet, with just a parting of blue sky above green alleys. The cathedral is set in its midst, on a hill to which all ways climb. Seen from a distance, it is formidable, and seems to brood over the town as if weighing upon it, like an oddly-shaped rock or mountain. Seen from near, it imposes by its immense breath, raised higher than the ground before it by a broad flight of low steps. There are five doorways, three of the thirteenth century, and two towers, of unequal height, in one of which one sees the plain, wholly structural building of the fourteenth century, and in the other, which first attracts the eye, the more obtrusive decoration, all in spikes and spires, and the weaker structure, of the sixteenth century. The window under the rose of slender, veined stone-work has been walled up; most of the full-length statues which once stood around the doorways are gone, and the six that remain on one side of the central doorway are all headless. The façade has neither the harmony

nor the luxurious detail of Amiens but, especially when seen at night, with the after sunset light upon it, or stretched upon the sky of moonlight, the windows blackened and the grey stone turned white, the breadth of it becomes enormous, fills the sky, and what is plain, unimaginative, merely adequate and explicit in the sides and buttresses, becomes delicate, becomes living, under that softening of light. Seen from the terrace of the Archbishop's garden, at the back, one distinguishes the fine, original symmetry of the choir, with its three-fold curve, each curve, as it rises a story, tightened more closely about the building. And, as you walk round, you see the two great side doorways, with their rigid, almost Assyrian sculpture, with winged bulls and formal squares and patterns woven and plaited in the stone.

The sculpture of the façade is not for the most part so fine or so naïvely harmonious as at Amiens, but the tympanum of the central doorway contains a "Last Judgment," which is full of grotesque vigour. Startled folk rise up naked and with a sudden sense of shame, out of their tombs, pushing up the stone lids of their coffins, and stepping out eagerly with stiff unaccustomed limbs; they turn towards heaven, or hell, which are represented above by angels who receive the saints, clothed, into the gate of heaven, while triumphing devils thrust the sinners, naked, along the road to the bottomless pit. One devil has a second face in his stomach, like the monsters of the Cologne school of painters; another has a tail which ends in a dog's head, reaching forward through his legs and biting the legs of a man in front. Devils with faces full of horrible mirth lift up men and women on their shoulders, and stamp them down into a boiling cauldron; you see the flames underneath, and two devils blowing the bellows. Two toads climb up outside the cauldron; one is in the act

of crawling into the mouth of a man, while the other sucks at the breast of a woman. There is a kind of cheerful horror in all these figures in pain ; they are rendered calmly, without emotion, without pity. They and the saints have the same quite credible existence ; they are carved there as if by act of faith, and are not so poignantly human as to trouble the living more than a text of the Bible, read out in Latin.

The sculpture of the Middle Ages is a kind of negation : it is the art of the body practised by artists who hold the body in contempt, and it aims at rendering the soul without doing honour to the body. These sculptors, with their imperfect command of the only means by which the soul can be made visible, may seem to become only more exterior as they strain after a more ascetic ideal. At Bourges there is less than at Amiens of that fine, homely feeling for character in faces ; the body counts for more, and the body is ashamed of nakedness and uncomely without a covering.

Outside, the cathedral impresses by its mass, its breath, the immense emphasis of its five doorways set side by side, the almost eastern strangeness of those two other doorways, in which some of the figures are taken from an older church of the eleventh century. It has weight, solemnity, with something incalculable in its separate effects, though with none of the daintiness of Amiens. But inside, all that is exquisite because vital in its symmetry becomes at once visible. Unity, ease, sequence, elegance, are the qualities of this naked interior, in which the long and naked alleys have the harmonious beauty of abstract line. From the western door one looks uninterruptedly through the church to the windows behind the choir ; the choir is no more than a little space as if temporarily railed off from the nave ; and on each side a row of slender, wholly undecorated pillars

drapes the nave as if with long straight hangings. A double line of aisles follows the whole length of the church, curving delicately around the choir; the lines dwindle, curve, disappear, almost mysteriously. Their evasiveness is like a last, less definite suggestion, completing what is frank and precise in the bare elegance of the structure. The aisles surround the church like arcades; the low inner one, which remains always dim, while the nave and the outer aisles are open to travelling rays of light, has a touch of mystery entirely absent from the daylight church of Amiens. The stone tracery of the windows is unusually fine and elaborate; the rose-window, seen from the east, is pale, like a star appearing at the end of an alley of trees. Here, windows are an accessory, and not, as in Amiens, a part of the structure, which has been thought out in stone, and exists with an incomparable simplicity.

And yet the windows at Bourges are the finest windows in France. This thirteenth century glass has at once grandeur and subtlety; it glows like a flower-garden in which all the flowers are jewels, and it is set in patterns of wheels and trefoils and circles, and in patterns made up of the mingling of many shapes. Even from outside, when the sun touches them, the windows begin to glow between their leads and lines of stone. There are windows like tapestries, windows that are curtains against the world, windows as if the wall had opened suddenly upon some paradise. Beyond the choir the naked greyness of the wall flames into fiery purple, into sombre reds, into a royal pomp of blue and crimson. The oldest of the windows are in fixed shapes, into which little naïve pictures are framed, each separate in design, combined into patterns by the leads which divide them into masses of simple colour. In other windows the design is allowed to

flow, after its own pattern, like that of a picture ; and with what admirable sense of design, with what subtleties of colour ! Certainly the glass workers who made these windows were finer artists than the workers in stone who made even the most vivid of the exterior sculptures. And their work lives, with a renewed life, and in all its freshness, day by day. At early morning, when the façade is not warmed and the rose-window fades like a flower, the windows about the choir re-awaken. All that was sombre in them has gone, or remains only to heighten their exaltation. Underneath, priests say mass, and the people turn up their faces as if to worship the sun coming out of the east.

1903.

THE DECAY OF CRAFTSMANSHIP IN ENGLAND

i

IN the year 1903 I went several times to the seventh exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, and what I saw set me thinking about the possibilities of craftsmanship in England; and I asked myself: Does good craftsmanship exist among us any longer, and, if not, why not? and, if so, where is it to be seen?

On entering the New Gallery, and strolling from room to room, my eye was shocked and distracted by a mingling of what was tawdry with what was trivial. Colour blazed, writhing dragons of form clawed at me on all sides; nothing allured or persuaded or stood aloof, content to be alone; the voices of rival eccentricities cried down each other, in a hubbub of self-praise. I felt as if I had found my way into some monstrous market, in which the fruits and vegetables were all of gold and fiery stones, and the stalls asked to be admired, and the nails that fastened plank to plank said: Look at us, we too are Art. Everything was dead, and had a dull glitter, like the scales of a dead fish. Human figures, grimacing in some unearthly way, stared at me from the walls, without human resemblance, and yet left brutally naked of the new body of art. Spiders' webs of chains, in which finikin stones were meshed, trailed across the interior of glass cases, among spectral rings and lurid enamels. I was

in the midst of a tangle of crawling and stunted and desperately self-assertive things. I turned this way and that in the labyrinth, bewildered and unhappy ; I had come to look for pure design, for mastery and subtlety of line, and I found no design, only ornament ; no sense of line, only of angle and excrescence.

As I came away from the gallery I thought of an exhibition of old silver which I had seen lately at the Fine Art Society's, and I recalled some knives, some spoons, and some " vase-shaped dishes with covers " of English make (dating from Charles I. to George III.) which I had seen there, along with scarcely better Dutch and French work. They had no other beauty but that of line : what other beauty can a silver spoon have ? But they had given me a sense of perfect satisfaction ; I had asked no more of them than they had to give me : they had come into a quiet, undefeatable existence as beautiful things, made for use, and perfectly adapted for their use, but with what beauty as a sort of soul in a body. To turn from this reticent old silver, so discreet and gentlemanly, to these modern toys, like vulgar women in æsthetic clothes which neither fitted nor disguised their bodies, was to force upon myself the question : Has the sense of beauty, the sense of proportion, gone completely out of the modern English mind ? Here were these rooms full of chairs and cabinets and chimney-corners and stuffs and jewels, all made for effect, with a deliberate aim at making something which would look beautiful in a house ; and with all this effort, and the democratic banner of Mr. Walter Crane flying, and the encouragement of critics and buyers and a plentiful and appreciative public, we are only so much the farther away from the plain man who made the silver spoon to please himself, and has got no advertisement out of it yet.

For fifteen years the Society of Arts and Crafts has done its best to foster and to reward the making of beautiful things for every-day use. It has had from time to time beautiful things in its exhibitions. But now, after fifteen years of a sort of propaganda, after this persistent search for the craftsman, the craftsman has exhausted himself by his few little successes, and we see him relapsing into a kind of manufacturer of " art nouveau " under another name, a follower of the violently effective German methods with none of the disastrous German energy, a feeble dilettante in bric-à-brac. What is called the movement of Morris was literally Morris's vivid personal movement ; it began, and all but ended, in himself ; and in many ways was an interesting expression of an extraordinarily interesting temperament, rather than a thing purely admirable in itself, or at all safe as a model for others. We have had no living tradition for our craftsmen to work in ; Morris had to resuscitate one, and the Committee of the Arts and Crafts has tried to piece one together ; but neither endeavour has taken root ; we have merely a certain number of good things designed and made by Morris, and a certain number of good things designed and made since.

Those responsible for a public exhibition are no doubt very much at the mercy of their exhibitors. You cannot fill a gallery with masterpieces if no masterpieces come knocking at the door. But at least it is the business of a committee to enforce some statute of limitation ; at the worst, to close its doors, and to admit honestly : We have nothing worth showing to show. Now, can it really be said that this seventh exhibition of the Arts and Crafts has justified its existence by the merit of a sufficient number of its contents ? A few good books and bindings, a pendant or a necklace, a cabinet or two, a few woodcuts : is this enough good work

for an exhibition of 625 articles? And of these, scarcely one is to be accepted without reserve. The writing-cabinet and music-cabinet, in which natural woods are set together in patterns of their own, have timid locks and clumsy feet; the woodcuts, powerful as they are, are not wholly original in manner; the few good bits of jewellery have more negative than positive merits. The preface to the catalogue quotes with satisfaction the speech of "the representative of Sweden upon the International Jury which assembled at Turin to award the diplomas, medals, and prizes" at last year's International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art; and this gentleman speaks with enthusiasm of "this new ideal of style and beauty of line and colours which distinguishes our epoch, and which we call—not without pride—the new art." And he points to England as the origin of "art nouveau," which, as I have said, has come home to roost there. Was it for this result that the Arts and Crafts first opened its doors? to encourage a structureless deformation of line and a meaningless degradation of colour which has now appropriately found a place among the scenic properties of Drury Lane? It is towards this, at any rate, that the Arts and Crafts is tending, and by so doing it is ranging itself definitely on the wrong side, on the side of the mob; it is helping to build up false ideals in the minds of people who will not be able to correct them by looking at good things in the South Kensington Museum, or the Musée de Cluny, or the Poldi-Pezzoli, or the Nürnberg Museum.

Many of the people who go to such an exhibition as this of the Arts and Crafts are simple people who are quite anxious to know what is beautiful and what is not. They come honestly to improve their taste, as the phrase is; they will not like most of what they see, but they will try to like it.

They will come away, not only without having improved their taste, but having spoilt a little of the innocence of their ignorance.

ii

No, it is certain that we have outlived the age of the craftsman, the age in which beauty was the natural attendant on use. If you pass from a Greek statue to the contents of a Greek woman's toilet-table, or indeed to the pots and pans of her kitchen, you will be conscious of no such sudden change as in passing from a modern host's private picture-gallery into the bedroom where you are to sleep. The sauce-pan and the hair-pins belong to the same atmosphere as the statue, they were made with the same grave simplicity. It had not yet occurred to the civilised world that it was possible to do without beauty in the things which one handled every day. And that strict, natural union of use and beauty kept extravagance out of things made for a definite purpose. The appropriate fulfilling of the purpose was what the craftsmen aimed at.

Nowadays we have our Art and we have our Utility, and if ever we attempt to unite them it is in some such unnatural bondage as in many of these inconvenient articles now on exhibition. The beauty, if there is any, is stuck on to some corner of the thing, is not an outcome of the nature of the thing. Our artists, accustomed to the painting of detachable pictures, to be fixed in a frame, and carried about from place to place, are unable to conceive of this adjustment of beauty to use, this forgotten relation of cause to effect. We see them bringing their minds to this false problem: how to escape from the limitations of the thing as it is, as its purpose

requires it to be, how to bring some new element into it. They cannot bring their minds to the right focus, and so the shapes get twisted.

In this matter, as in all others, we have become specialists ; the craftsman is no longer an artist, and the artist can no longer be a craftsman. What we see in the Arts and Crafts, in these ambitious attempts, is only another symptom of what we see in all the shops in London. The most difficult thing to get in London is a piece of plain carpet, without any pattern on it whatever, and when you have found it you will generally have to get it dyed to the colour you want. A piece of plain wall-paper to match it will be the next most difficult thing to get ; and for both these things you will have to pay much more than you would pay for a carpet or a wall-paper covered with hideous patterns. Surely the mere printing, not to say inventing, of these patterns must cost money ; why, then, cannot a cheaper and a less objectionable thing be offered to you without them ? For this reason, say the shopkeepers, that only one person out of a thousand will buy it. That the pattern is a bad pattern, no one seems to mind ; there must be some scrawl for the money.

I do not know how far the bad craftsman persuades the public, or how far the public gives his directions to the bad craftsman. But judging by women's fashions, and the meekness with which a woman will make herself like all the other women of this season and unlike herself and all the women of last season, I imagine that the public will accept whatever is given to it in sufficient quantity and with sufficient assurance. Then it is rarely the craftsman who thinks his pretence at decoration beautiful, and the public is but repeating the lesson it has learnt from him when it clamours for its " twopence coloured." He, or the man who sells his goods, has

invented a word to describe the last touch which invariably spoils even the nearest approach to good design: it is a "finish." "This gives it a finish, sir," says the shopman, as he proudly points out to you exactly how the thing is spoilt.

I suppose that the craftsmen who design our lamp-posts, our fire-irons, the stripes of our pyjamas and the shape of our pianos, are humble persons not in a "higher way of business" than the craftsmen who made those "vase-shaped dishes" I was speaking of, or the engraved weights with which the butchers weighed their meat in ancient Rome or Greece. But the latest artist in iron-work to the County Council does not exhibit at the Arts and Crafts. A craftsman must be fairly in earnest to send his goods to be judged by a committee seated at the New Gallery. All these trivial and fantastical things are made merely to sell; they are made with the best intentions; only the artist has put the "finish" all over them; it is not only the last touch that sends them wrong.

And in how many cases is not the very form itself founded on a misconception! Take, for instance, the wall-papers, and put aside the question of their merit as designs. May it not be reasonably contended that any design whatever on a wall-paper is decoratively wrong? In the modern house a wall-paper is a background, on which pictures and other objects are to be set. It is made, however, as if it were a thing in itself, a tapestry, which is itself to form the decoration of the room. What harmony can there possibly be between the crowded lines and colours of the wall-paper and the various pictures which are to be hung upon it? A carpet, on which nothing is set which can be considered in closer relation to it than that of the most general colour-scheme,

need not be plain, though one may prefer to have it plain ; a designed wall-paper, unless it is to be the only decoration of the walls, is itself an anomaly.

iii

Has the Englishman always been without taste in these matters of household and personal decoration ? Are we wholly deficient as a race in any fine sense of beauty outside picture frames and the covers of books ? By no means. Take the George silver, the Jacobean furniture, the best English china. Here is an Elizabethan ring, gold and enamel, with a square-set jacinth : it has a temperate beauty of its own, which can be compared with the more elaborate richness of the Italians, the more massive character of the Germans, the daintier French style. Here is an oak chest, which belonged to George Mason ; it was made no more than a hundred and fifty or so years ago ; there is some carving on it which has a kind of village simplicity, and it is nicely proportioned, nicely divided into panels. I could point to the arm-chairs and settles in which you may still rest in certain village inns ; and, if you like, you may look up at the thick black beams of the ceiling.

Modern craftsmanship is the craftsmanship of the machine, those deadly pistons and hammers have got into our very brains, and a serious artist, who gives himself the time to think out a piece of work, and do it with his own hands, can no longer either think or do anything that is not mechanical. We pride ourselves on being a business nation : look at one part of the result. The Americans pride themselves on being an even more businesslike business nation ; and has any beautifully made thing come out of America since we

colonised it? In so far as it has tried to oppose commercialism the Arts and Crafts Society has done the right thing; the lamentable part of it is that it tilts with so ineffectual a lance. It is useless to show us feeble work merely because it is hand-made. Virtue never was its own reward on such dubious conditions. Baudelaire, in one of his priceless moralisings, pointed out that the unconventional artist must first be able to outdo the Philistine on the ground of the Philistine, before he goes on to triumph on his own. Just so the man must show the machine that he can do all its own work better, before he sets out to do what the machine cannot do at all.

1903.

BEETHOVEN

i

THE foundation of Beethoven's art is, as Wagner pointed out, a great innocence. It is the unconscious innocence of the child and the instructed innocence of the saint. Beethoven is the most childlike of musicians, and of all artists it is most natural to the musician to be childlike. There is, in every artist, a return toward childhood; he must be led by the hand through the streets of the world, in which he wanders open-eyed and with heedless feet. Pious hands must rock him to sleep, comfort his tears, and labour with him in his playtime. He will speak the wisdom of the child, unconsciously, without translating it into the formal language of experience.

Beethoven's naïveté can be distinguished at every moment in his music; in his simplicities, trivialities, in his ready acceptance of things as they are, and, again, in his gravities and what may seem like over-emphasis. It does not occur to him that you will not take things as simply as he does. His music is "nature, heard through a temperament," and he hears the voices of nature with almost the credulity with which he hears the often deceiving voices of men.

Modern musicians are on their guard, even against nature. Wagner is never without the consciousness of so many things which his critical intelligence whispers to him that he

must refrain from. What modern painter was it who said that " nature put him out " ? Wagner takes elaborate precautions against being put out by nature, and, after that, against allowing any one to suppose that nature has put him out. But Beethoven surrenders. It is unthinkable to him that a sound could deceive him.

It is usual to compare Beethoven with Shakespeare ; but is he, in any sense, a dramatist ? Is he not rather, if we are to speak in terms of literature, an epic poet, nearer to Homer and to Milton than to Shakespeare ? When Beethoven becomes tremendous, it is the sublime, not in action, but in being ; his playfulness is a nobler *Comus*, a pastoral more deeply related to the innocence and ecstasy of nature. He has the heroic note of Homer, or of Milton's Satan, or of Dante, whom in some ways he most resembles ; but I distinguish no Lear, no Hamlet, no Othello. Nor is his comedy Shakespearean, a playing with the pleasant humour of life on its surface ; it is the gaiety which cries in the bird, rustles in leaves, shines in spray ; it is a voice as immediate as sunlight. Some new epithet must be invented for this music which narrates nothing, yet is epic ; sings no articulate message, yet is lyric ; moves to no distinguishable action, yet is already awake in the void waters, out of which a world is to awaken.

ii

Music, as Schopenhauer has made clear to us, is not a representation of the world, but an immediate voice of the world. The musician, he tells us, " reveals the innermost essential being of the world, and expresses the highest wisdom in a language his reason does not understand." " We may take the perceptible world, or nature, and music, as two

different expressions of the same thing." "Accordingly, we might call the world 'embodied music,'" music differing from all other arts in this, "that it is not an image of phenomena," but represents "the thing itself which lies behind all appearances." In the language of the Schoolmen, "concepts are *universalia post rem*, actuality *universalia in re*, whereas music gives *universalia ante rem*."

It is thus that the musician joins hands with the child and the saint, if, as we may believe, the child still remembers something of

that imperial palace whence he came,

and the saint lives always in such a house not made with hands. The musician, through what is active in his art, creates over again, translates for us, that whole essential part of things which is ended when we speak, and deformed when we begin labouring to make it visible in marble, or on canvas, or through any of the actual particles of the earth. All Beethoven's waking life was a kind of somnambulism, more literally so than that of any other man of genius; and not only when deafness dropped a soft enveloping veil between him and discords. "Must not his intercourse with the world," says Wagner, in his book on Beethoven, "resemble the condition of one who, awakening from deepest sleep, in vain endeavours to recall his blissful dream?" To Shakespeare, to Michelangelo, who are concerned with the phenomena of the world as well as with "the thing itself which lies behind all appearances," something is gained, some direct aid for art, by a continual awakening out of that trance in which they speak with nature. Beethoven alone, the musician, gains nothing: he is concerned only with one

world, the inner world; and it is well for him if he never awakens.

Why is it that music is not limited in regard to length, as a poem is, a lyrical poem, to which music is most akin? Is it not because the ecstasy of music can be maintained indefinitely and at its highest pitch, while the ecstasy of verse is shortened by what is definite in words? There are poems of Swinburne which attempt to compete with music on its own ground, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, for example; and they tire the ear which the music of Wagner's *Tristan* keeps passionately alert for a whole evening. This is because we ask of words some more definite appeal to the mind than we ask of music, and an unsubstantial ecstasy wearies us like the hollow voice of a ghost, which we doubt while we hear it. Music comes speaking the highest wisdom in a language which our reason does not understand; because it is older and deeper and closer to us than our reason. Music can prolong, reiterate, and delicately vary the ecstasy itself: and its voice is all the while speaking to us out of our own hearts. To listen to music is a remembrance, and it is only of memory that men never grow weary.

Music, says Wagner profoundly, "blots out our entire civilisation as sunshine does lamplight." It is the only art which renders us completely unconscious of everything else but the ecstasy at the root of life; it is the only art which we can absorb with closed eyes, like an articulate perfume; it is the only divine drunkenness, the only Dionysiac art. Beethoven's Tenth Symphony was to have been a direct hymn to Dionysus. "In the Adagio," he noted in his sketch-book, "the text of a Greek myth, *cantique ecclesiastique*, in the Allegro feast of Bacchus." It was to do what Goethe had tried to do in the Second part of "Faust": reconcile

the Pagan with the Christian world. But it was to do more than that, and would it not have taken us deeper even than the Hymn to Joy of the Ninth Symphony : to that immeasurable depth out of which the cry of suffering is a hymn of victory ?

Music, then, being this voice of things in themselves, and the only magic against the present, it will be useless to search into Beethoven's life, and to ask of his music some correspondence between its colour and humour and the colour and humour of events. Let us take an instance. In the year 1802 Beethoven wrote that tragic confession known as the Testament of Heiligenstadt. The whole agony of his deafness has come upon him. " I must live," he says, " like an exile. . . . Such things brought me to the verge of desperation, and well-nigh caused me to put an end to my life. . . . I joyfully hasten to meet death. If he comes before I have had the opportunity of developing all my artistic powers, then, notwithstanding my cruel fate, he will come too early for me, and I should wish for him at a more distant period ; but even then I shall be content, for his advent will release me from a state of endless suffering." And, on the outside of the sealed packet, to be opened only at his death, he writes : " Oh, Providence, vouchsafe me one day of pure felicity ! " Now it was at this period that Beethoven wrote the Second Symphony. I turn to Berlioz's analysis of it in his *Étude critique des Symphonies de Beethoven*, and I read : " Le *scherzo* est aussi franchement gai dans sa capricieuse fantaisie, que *l'andante* a été complètement heureux et calme ; car tout est riant dans cette symphonie, les élans guerriers du premier *allegro* sont eux-mêmes tout à fait exempts de violence ; on n'y saurait voir que l'ardeur juvénile d'un noble cœur dans lequel se sont conservées intactes les plus belles illusions de la vie."

" Les plus belles illusions de la vie ! " " The fond hope I brought with me here," writes Beethoven at Heiligenstadt, " of being to a certain degree cured, now utterly forsakes me. As the autumn leaves fall and wither, so are my hopes blighted."

Twice in Beethoven's life there is an interruption in his unceasing labour at his work. The first time is during the three years from 1808 to 1811, when he was in love with Thérèse Malfatti ; the second time is from 1815 to 1818, after his brother's death. During these two periods he wrote little of importance ; personal emotion gripped him, and he could not loosen the grasp. During all the rest of his agitated and tormented life, nothing, neither the constant series of passionate and brief loves, nor constant bodily sickness, trouble about money, trouble about friends, relations, and the unspeakable nephew, meant anything vital to his deeper self. The nephew helped to kill him, but could not colour a note of his music. Not " his view of the world," but the world itself spoke through those sounds which could never shrink to the point at which these earthly discords were audible. Music is a refuge, and can speak with the same voice to the man who is suffering as to the man who is happy, and through him, with the same voice, when he is suffering or when he is happy. It is here that music is so different from literature, for instance, where the words mean things, and bring back emotions too clearly and in too personal a way. The musician is, after all, the one impersonal artist, who, having lived through joy and sorrow, has both in his hands ; can use them like the right hand and the left.

And just as the musician can do without life, can be uncontaminated by life, so, in his relations with other arts, with the mechanism of words and the conditions of writing

for the stage and such like, he will have his own touchstone, his own standard of values. During a great part of his life Beethoven was looking out for a libretto on which he could write an opera. His one opera, "Fidelio," is written on a miserable libretto; but the subject, with its heroisms, was what he wanted, and he was probably little conscious of the form in which it was expressed; for with him the words meant nothing, but the nature of the emotion which these words expressed was everything. When he said, speaking as some have thought slightingly of Mozart, that he would never have written a *Don Giovanni* or a *Figaro*, he merely meant that the very nature of such subjects was antipathetic to him, and that he could never have induced himself to take them seriously. Mozart, with his divine nonchalance, snatched at any earthly happiness, any gaiety of the flesh or spirit, and changed it instantly into the immortal substance of his music. But Beethoven, with his peasant's seriousness, could not jest with virtue or the rhythmical order of the world. His art was his religion, and must be served with a devotion in which there was none of the easy pleasantness of the world.

And it was for this reason that he could find his own pasture in bad poets, like Klopstock, whom he carried about with him for years, like a Bible. Goethe, he admits later, had spoiled Klopstock for him. But still Klopstock was always "maestoso, D flat major"; he "exalted the mind." He brooded over Sturm's devotional work, *Considerations on the Works of God in Nature*, because he found in it his own deep, strenuously unlimited, love of God. It was the fundamental idea that he cared for, always; and, for the most part, this drew him to the greatest writers: to Homer and Shakespeare for heroic poetry, to Plutarch for the lives of

heroes. And he was incapable of unbending, of finding pleasure in work which seemed to come from a less noble impulse. During his last illness one of Scott's novels was brought to him, that he might read something which would not fatigue him too much. But after a few pages he tossed the book aside : " The man seems to be writing for money," he said.

There stood on Beethoven's writing-table, during most of his life, a sheet of paper, framed and under glass, on which he had written carefully three maxims, found by Champollion-Figeac among the inscriptions of an Egyptian temple : " Je suis ce qui est.—Je suis tout ce qui est, ce qui a été, ce qui sera ; nulle main mortelle n'a soulevé mon voile.—Il est par lui-même et c'est à lui que tout doit son existence."

When I said that Beethoven had the innocence of the saint as well as that of the child, I was thinking partly of that passionate love of nature which, in him, was like an instinct which becomes a religion. He wrote to Thérèse : " No man on earth can love the country as I do. It is trees, woods, and rocks that return to us the echo of our thought." He rushed into the open air, as into a home, out of one miserable lodging after another, in which the roofs and walls seemed to hedge him round. Klöber the painter tells us how, when he was in the country he " would stand still, as if listening, with a piece of music-paper in his hand, look up and down, and then write something." He liked to lie on his back, staring into the sky ; in the fields he could give way to the intoxication of his delight ; there, nothing came between him and the sun ; which, said Turner, is God.

The animal cry of desire is not in Beethoven's music. Its Bacchic leapings, when mirth abandons itself to the last ecstasy, have in them a sense of religious abandonment which

belongs wholly to the Greeks, to whom this abandonment brought no suggestion of sin. With Christianity, the primitive orgy, the unloosing of the instincts, becomes sinful; and in the music of Wagner's Venusberg we hear the cry of nature turned evil. Pain, division of soul, reluctance, come into this once wholly innocent delight in the drunkenness of the senses; and a new music, all lascivious fever and tormented and unwilling joy, arises to be its voice. But to Beethoven nature was still healthy, and joy had not begun to be a subtle form of pain. His joy sometimes seems to us to lack poignancy, but that is because the gods, for him, have never gone into exile, and the wine-god is not "a Bacchus who has been in hell." Yet there is passion in his music, a passion so profound that it becomes universal. He loves love, rather than any of the images of love. He loves nature with the same, or with a more constant, passion. He loves God, whom he cannot name, whom he worships in no church built with hands, with an equal rapture. Virtue appears to him with the same loveliness as beauty. And out of all these adorations he has created for himself a great and abiding joy. The breadth of the rhythm of his joy extends beyond mortal joy and mortal sorrow. There are times when he despairs for himself, never for the world. Law, order, a faultless celestial music, alone existed for him; and these he believed to have been settled, before time was, in the heavens. Thus his music was neither revolt nor melancholy, each an atheism: the one being an arrangement of God and the other a denial of God.

iii

Beethoven invented no new form: he expanded form to the measure of his intentions, making it contain what he

wanted. Sometimes it broke in the expansion, yet without setting him on the search for some new form which would be indefinitely elastic. The *Massa Solennis*, for instance, grew beyond the proportions of a mass, and was finished with no thought of a service of the church ; the music went its own way, and turned into a vast shapeless oratorio, an anomaly of the concert-room. *Fidelio* is an opera which has not even the formal merits of the best operas produced on the Italian method ; it lives a separate life in divine fragments, and is wholly expressive only in the two great overtures, of which only the second is properly speaking dramatic, while the third transcends and escapes drama. In the second overture, music speaks, in these profound and sombre voices, as in a drama in which powers and destinies contend in the air. The trumpet-call behind the scenes attaches it, by a deliberate externality, to the stage. But in the third overture, where music surges up out of some hell which is heaven, that it may make a new earth, there is hardly anything that we can limit or identify as drama ; not even the trumpet-call behind the scenes, which has become wholly a part of the musical texture, and no longer calls off the mind from that deeper sense of things.

Yet, if we follow Beethoven through any series of his works, through the sonatas, for instance, or the symphonies, we shall see a steady development, almost wholly unexperimental, and for that all the more significant. Each of the symphonies develops out of the last, each is a step forward ; not that each is literally greater than the last, but has something new in it, an acquirement in art, or a growth in personality. That this should be so is the only excuse for an artist's production ; only secondary men repeat themselves ; the great artist is incapable of turning back. As he goes forward,

the public, naturally, which has come to accept him at a given moment of his progress, remains stationary; and when the public is not wholly dominated by a great name, so that it dares not rebel enough to choose after its own liking, there comes a time when the public ceases to comprehend, and begins to prefer, that is to condemn.

The public of Beethoven's day, like the public for which and against which every great artist has worked, forgot that its only duty is to receive blindly whatever a great artist, once recognised as such, has to give it; that its one virtue is gratitude, and its cardinal sin, an attempt at discrimination. Beethoven had not to wait for fame; his earliest compositions were admired, his first publication was well paid. "Publishers dispute one with another," he wrote early in life: "I fix my own price." Yet, at the same time, he was never, up to the very end of his career, taken entirely at his own valuation, and allowed to do what he liked in whatever way he liked. In 1816 the Philharmonic Society sent one of its members to ask for a new symphony, and to offer £100 for it. Beethoven, who had already written his Eighth Symphony, was about to accept the offer, when it was intimated to him that the new work must be in the style of his earlier symphonies. He refused with indignation, and London lost the honour of having "ordered" the Ninth Symphony. Ten years earlier he had begged for the post of composer to the Vienna opera, engaging to compose an opera and an opera-comique or ballet every year, in return for a very moderate salary. The letter of request was not even answered. Before that, *Fidelio* had failed, and the critics had assured one another that "the music was greatly inferior to the expectations of amateurs and connoisseurs." In other words, Beethoven, recognised from the first as a great artist, was never

accepted in the only way in which public appreciation can be other than an insult: he was never wholly "hors concours." Just before his death, one of his intimate friends took it upon him to say that he preferred a certain one of the last quartets to the others. "Each," said Beethoven, once and for all, "has its merit in its own way."

iv

Wagner has pointed out that it was bodily motion which first gave its beat to music; that is to say, that the articulate life of music comes from what is most instinctive in life itself. All instrumental music has its origin in the dance, and in the symphonies of Haydn we have little more than a succession of dances with variations. And Beethoven, in one movement, the Minuet or Scherzo, gives us, as Wagner says, "a piece of real dance-music, which could very well be danced to. An instinctive need seems to have led the composer into quite immediate contact with the material basis of his work for once in its course, as though his foot were feeling for the ground that was to carry him."

Is it not here, in this solid and unshakable acceptance of what is simplest, most fundamental, in life itself and in the life of music, that Beethoven comes into deepest contact with humanity, and lays his musical foundations for eternity? And he is himself, first of all, and before he begins to write music, a part of nature, instinctive. In Beethoven the peasant and the man of genius are in continual, fruitful conflict. A bodily vigour, as if rooted in the earth, is hourly shattered. and built up again by the nerves in action and recoil. And, in the music itself, quite literally, and almost at its greatest, one hears this elemental peasant; as in the *Allegro con brio*

of the Seventh Symphony, with its shattering humour. It is a big, frank, gross, great thing, wallowing in its mirth like a young Hercules. Often, as in the last movement of the *Trio* (Op. 97), he disconcerts you by his simplicity, his buoyant and almost empty gaiety. It is difficult to realise that a great man can be so homely and such a child. No one else accepts nature any longer on such confiding terms. And he has but just awakened out of an *Andante* in which music has been honey to the tongue and an ecstatic peace to the soul.

This simplicity, this naïve return to origins, to the dance-tune, to a rhythm which can swing from the village band in the *Scherzo* of the Pastoral Symphony to the vast elemental surge of the *Allegro* of the Choral Symphony (as of the morning stars singing together) leads, now and then, to what has been taken for something quite different from what it is: an apparent aim at realism, which is no more than apparent. In the whole of the Pastoral Symphony one certainly gets an atmosphere which is the musical equivalent of skies and air and country idleness and the delight of sunlight, not because a bird cries here and there, and a storm mutters obviously among the double basses, but because a feeling, constantly at the roots of his being, and present in some form in almost all his music, came for once to be concentrated a little deliberately, as if in a dedication, by way of gratitude. All through there is humour, and the realism is a form of it, the bird's notes on the instruments, the thunder and wind and the flowing of water, as certainly as the village band. Here, as everywhere, it was, as he said, " expression of feeling rather than painting " that he aimed at; and it would be curious if these humorous asides, done with childish good-humour, should have helped to lead the way to much serious modern

music, in which natural sounds, and all the accidents of actual noise, have been solemnly and conscientiously imitated for their own sakes.

Is Beethoven's act in calling in the help of words and voices at the end of the Ninth Symphony necessarily to be taken as leading the way to Wagner, as Wagner held, and as at first sight seems unquestionable? Is it Beethoven's confession that there comes a moment when music can say no more, and words must step in to carry on the meaning of the sounds? If so, does not the whole theory of music being the voice of nature itself, an art which has arisen "from the immediate consciousness of the identity of our inner being with that of the outer world," as Wagner calls it, fall to the ground? It seems to me that in adding voices to the instruments, Beethoven did no more than add another exquisitely expressive instrument to the orchestra; in adding that instrument he added words also, because words support the voice, as the shoulder supports the violin. But I contend that the words of Schiller's *Hymn to Joy* might be replaced by meaningless vowels and consonants, and that the effect of the Choral Symphony would be identically the same. Beethoven's inspiration consisted in seeing that the effect of exultation at which he was aiming could best be rendered by a chorus of voices, voices considered as instruments; he was increasing his orchestra, that was all.

Wagner, it is true, realised this; but, having realised it, he goes on to conceive of a Shakespeare entering the world of light simultaneously with a Beethoven entering the world of sound, and a new, finer art arising out of that mingling. Here, of course, he becomes the apologist of his own music-drama; and it is in its claim to have done just this that it demands consideration. Has Wagner, in sub-

ordinating his music, if not to the words, at all events to the action, expressed partly by the words, really carried music further, or has he added another firmer link to the chain which holds music to the earth? Music-drama, since Wagner has existed, there will always be; but may there not be also a music more and more "absolute," of which voices may indeed form part, but voices without words, adding an incomparable instrument to the orchestra? Why need music, if it is the voice of something deeper than action, care to concern itself with drama, which is the ripple on the surface of a great depth? As it dispenses with the stage, or the conscious exercise of the eyes, so it will dispense with words, or the conscious exercise of the mind through the hearing, and, in an equal degree, with the intrusive reasonings of a programme, at the best but misleading footnotes to a misinterpreted text.

V

In the later works of Beethoven we see his attempt to express himself within a fixed form, and yet without losing anything of what he wanted to say, through the pressure of those limits. "From the time," says Wagner, "when, in accord with the moving sorrows of his life, there awoke in the artist a longing for distinct expression of specific, characteristically individual emotions—as though to unbosom himself to the intelligent sympathy of fellow-men—and this longing grew into an ever more compulsive force; from that time when he began to care less and less about merely making music, about expressing himself agreeably, enthrallingly or inspiritingly in general, within that music; and, instead thereof, was driven by the general necessity of his

inner being to employ his art in bringing to sure and seizable expression a definite content that absorbed his thoughts and feelings," then, says Wagner, begins his agony.

And this agony is the effort, not so much to say in music things really or merely individual, but to force music to tell some of its own secrets, still secrets to Beethoven. The deepest poetry and the deepest philosophy in words have been for the most part questions to which no answer has been offered ; like the soliloquies of Hamlet and the thirty-eighth chapter of Job. When Beethoven is greatest his music speaks in a voice which suggests no words, and is the outpouring of a heart or soul too full for speech, and says speechless things. And at last Beethoven cares only for the saying of these speechless things, and because he cares supremely for this he refines his form, through which alone they can be spoken, with a more and more jealous care, fastening upon the roots of sound.

In Beethoven's later work, and especially in the last quartets, he seems actually to rarefy sound itself. What is this new subtlety and poignancy which comes into the notes themselves, as they obey a master who has proceeded by one exclusion after another, until he has refined sound to its last shade, or sharpened it to its ultimate point ? Already, in the Quartet in C major (Op. 59), in which a form is filled without excess and without default, a new colour comes into the harmonies, as they reach after an unlimited strength, seeking to avoid all merely formal or limiting sweetness. They have passed through fire, and come out changed, a new body which has found a new soul. Here there is drama, an ominous and mysterious drama, in which the instruments are the persons : tragic cries surge up and are quieted ; one hears the deathdrum beating, perhaps only in their veins.

The discord has found its place, liberating harmony, and, in the final fugue, one sees the strictest of forms set dancing and hurrying, with a meaning not only in the notes, but in some not easily followed process of thinking in music, with an actual intellectual ecstasy.

In the last quartets form is so completely mastered that form, as limit, disappears, and something new, strange, incalculable, arises and exists. The purity of its harmony is so acute that it is at once joy and pain, harmony and discord. Beauty, brought to this intensity, at moments goes mad with delight. There is a gay, mysterious, entangling gravity, a kind of crabbed sweetness, in which sweetness becomes savour. At times, as in the *Allegro* of the Quartet in B flat major (Op. 130), sound passes into a fluttering of wings, as Psyche, the butterfly, soars at last into sunlight. The music began with elfin laughter, turned serious, and meditated with fine subtlety, and then, in the frank and childish return " alla danza tedesca," seemed to go back to the first things of the earth, as to one's roots for new sap. And then, in that *Cavatina* which Beethoven wrote weeping, one overhears a noble and not despairing sorrow, which can weep but not whimper; an imploring, sadly questioning, unresentful lament; the most reticent sorrow ever rendered in music. To have written this movement is as great a thing as to have built a cathedral, in which, not more truly, the soul shelters from its grief.

When I hear the Quartet in F major (Op. 135), it seems to me that music has done nothing since, that it contains the germ, and more than the germ, of all modern music. It was such things, no doubt, as the Walkyries' Ride of the second movement, the *Vivace*, which seemed unintelligible, insane, to the people who first heard them, even after hearing all

the symphonies. With the first notes of the first movement we are in the heart of music, as if one awoke on board a ship, and was on the open sea, beyond sight of land. Here, and to the end, every note has its separate meaning, its individual life, and is more than the mere part of a whole. There is so much music which, because it is leading to something, does not stay by the way, conscious of itself, perfect as an end, though it is also perfect as the means to an end. In the *Lento* Beethoven prays ; there is in it a peace so profound and yet acute that it is almost sad ; yet it is neither joy nor sorrow, but a hymn to God out of sorrow, itself faith, resignation, and a sure and certain hope of the " rest that remaineth." Even Beethoven never made a more beautiful melody, nor was there ever in music a landscape of the soul so illuminated with all the soft splendour of sunlight. The *Grave* leading to the *Allegro*, with the words, " Muss es sein ? Es muss sein " (the " painfully made resolve ") seems willing, for once, in a kind of despair or distrust even of music, to fix a more precise meaning upon sounds. It is no more, really, than the irrelevant, touching, unneeded outcry of the artist, afraid that you may be overlooking something which he sees or hears, no doubt, so much more clearly than you, and which he cannot bear to think that you may be overlooking.

vi

In spite of Holbein, Dürer, and Cranach, in spite of the builders in stone and the workers in iron, the German genius has never found its complete expression in any of the plastic arts. Germany has had both poets and philosophers, who have done great things ; but it has done nothing supreme

except in music, and in music nothing supreme has been done outside Germany since the music of Purcell in England.

Dürer created a very German kind of beauty; philosophers, from Kant to Nietzsche, have created system after system of philosophy, each building on a foundation made out of the ruins of the last. Goethe gave wisdom to the world by way of Germany. But Goethe, excellent in all things, was supreme in none; and German beauty is not universal beauty. In Beethoven music becomes a universal language, and it does so without ceasing to speak German. Beethoven's music is national, as Dante's or Shakespeare's poetry is national; and it is only since Beethoven appeared in Germany that Germany can be compared with the Italy which produced Dante and the England which produced Shakespeare. On the whole, Germans have not been ungrateful. But they have had their own ways of expressing gratitude.

A German sculptor has represented Beethoven as a large, naked gentleman, sitting in an emblematical arm-chair with a shawl decently thrown across his knees. In this admired production all the evil tendencies, gross ambitions, and ineffectual energies of modern German art seem to have concentrated themselves. It is to be regretted that Beethoven, rather than any more showy person, Goethe, for instance, with his "Olympian" air, or Schiller, with his consumptive romanticism, should have been made the conspicuous victim of this worst form of the impotence of the moment. There is a sentence spoken by Emilia in that novel of George Meredith which no longer bears her more attractive name, through which we may see Beethoven as he was: "I have seen his picture in shop-windows: the wind seemed in his hair, and he seemed to hear with his eyes: his forehead frowning

so." To look from this visible image in words to the construction in stone of Max Klinger is to blot out vision with the dust of the quarry. During his lifetime Beethoven suffered many things from his countrymen, and now that he is dead they cannot let him alone in the grave; but must first come fumbling with heavy fingers at his skull (we are told its weight), and then setting up these dishonouring monuments in his honour.

1904.

THE IDEAS OF RICHARD WAGNER

i

ONE of the good actions of Baudelaire, whose equity of conscience in matters of art was flawless, may be seen in a pamphlet published in 1861, with the title *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris*. In this pamphlet Baudelaire has said the first and the last word on many of the problems of Wagner's work; and perhaps most decisively on that problem of artist and critic which has so often disturbed the judgment of reasoners in the abstract. Can the same man, people have said, of Wagner as of others, be a creator and also a thinker, an instinctive artist and a maker of theories? This is Baudelaire's answer, and it is sufficient: "It would be a wholly new event in the history of the arts if a critic were to turn himself into a poet, a reversal of every psychic law, a monstrosity; on the other hand, all great poets become naturally, inevitably, critics. I pity the poets who are guided solely by instinct; they seem to me incomplete. In the spiritual life of the former there must come a crisis when they would think out their art, discover the obscure laws in consequence of which they have produced, and draw from this study a series of precepts whose divine purpose is infallibility in poetic production. It would be prodigious for a critic to become a poet, and it is impossible for a poet not to contain a critic."

The chief distinction and main value of Wagner's theoretical writing lies in this fact, that it is wholly the personal expression of an artist engaged in creative work, finding out theories by the way, as he comes upon obstacles or aids in the nature of things. It may be contended that only this kind of criticism, the criticism of a creative artist, is of any real value; and Wagner's is for the most part more than criticism, or the judging of existent work; it is a building up of scaffolding for the erection of work to come. In *A Communication to my Friends* (1851), which is an autobiography of ideas, he has taken great pains to trace the unconscious, inevitable evolution of his work and of his ideas. He not only tells us, he proves to us, step by step, that none of his innovations were "prompted by reflection, but solely by practical experience, and the nature of his artistic aim." In this philosophical autobiography we see the growth of a great artist, more clearly perhaps than we see it in any similar document; certainly in more precise detail. Wagner's progress as an artist was vital, for it was the progress of life.

He looked upon genius as an immense receptivity, a receptivity so immense that it filled and overflowed the being, thus forcing upon it the need to create. And he distinguished between the two kinds of artist, feminine and masculine; the feminine who absorbs only art, and the masculine who absorbs life itself, and from life derives the new material which he will turn into a new and living art. He shows us, in his own work, the gradual way in which imitation passed into production, the unconscious moulding of the stuff of his art from within, as one need after another arose; the way in which every innovation in form came from a single cause: the necessity "to convey to others as vividly and

intelligibly as possible what his own mind's eye had seen." He learns sometimes from a failure, his failure to achieve a plan wrongly attempted ; sometimes from a disappointment, the disappointment of seeing work after work fail, and then that more hopeless one of being applauded for something other than he wanted to do, with " the good-humoured sympathy shown to a lunatic by his friends." Sometimes it is from a woman he learns, from an artist-woman like Schröder-Devrient, of whom he says : " The remotest contact with this extraordinary woman electrified me ; for many a long year, down even to the present day, I saw, I heard, I felt her near me, whenever the impulse to artistic production seized me." He learns from the Revolution of 1848, from the whistles of the Jockey Club at the first night of " Tannhäuser " in Paris, from a desperate realisation of what opera is, of what the theatre is, of what the public is. Nothing ever happens to him in vain ; nothing that touches him goes by without his seizing it ; he seizes nothing from which he does not wring out its secret, its secret for him. Thus alike his work and all his practical energies grow out of the very soil and substance of his life ; thus they are vital, and promise continuance of vitality, as few other works and deeds of art in our time can be said to do.

Nor must it be forgotten that we owe, if not the whole, at all events the main part, of Wagner's theoretical writing to the impossibility of putting his work before the public under the conditions which we judged indispensable to its proper realisation. Writing in 1857 on Liszt's Symphonic Poems, he declares proudly, " I will hold by my experience that whoever waits for recognition by his foes, before he can make up his mind about himself, must have indeed his share

of patience, but little ground for self-reliance." And in the admirable *Communication to my Friends*, he tells those friends why he addresses them and not the general, indifferent public ; and why " my friends must see the whole of me in order to decide whether they can be wholly my friends." He confesses how " tragical " it is that, under modern conditions, the artist must address himself to the understanding rather than to the feeling ; and this alike in his work and in his attempt to explain that work to the world which refuses to let him achieve it. So early as 1857 he decides, solemnly, publicly, that he will write no more theory ; twenty-five years before the time he announces his plans, absolutely completed, and declares, " Only with my work shall you see me again ! "

To read the pages which come after (by far the larger half of the prose works) is to follow step by step what seems a life's tragedy ; only that it is to end, one knows, as a divine comedy. A few ideas, a few needs, growing more and more precise, adjusted more and more definitely within their own limits, we find repeated and reiterated, without haste and without rest, through book, article, letter, speech. All this gathered energy presses forward in one direction, and from all points, with an attack as of the Japanese on Port Arthur, unweariable, self-forgetful, scientific. It is only in the last few years of his life that we get theory for theory's sake, in by no means the most valuable part of his work : discussions of religion (partly against Nietzsche), of civilisation (partly on behalf of Gobineau), dreams that had always been his, prophesyings, doctrine ; a kind of *Latter-day Pamphlets*, or that dogma into which the last words of a great artist so often harden.

ii

Wagner's fundamental ideas, with the precise and detailed statement and explanation of his conception of art, and of that work of art which it was his unceasing endeavour to create, or rather to organise, are contained in two of the earliest of his prose writings, *The Art-work of the Future* (1849) and *Opera and Drama* (1851). Everything else in his theoretical writing is a confirmation, or a correction, or (very rarely) a contradiction, of what is to be found in these two books; and their thorough understanding is so essential to any realisation of why Wagner did what he did, that I shall attempt to give as complete a summary as possible of the main ideas contained in them, as much as possible in his own words.

Here and elsewhere all my quotations will be taken from the monumental translation of Wagner's prose works by Mr. William Ashton Ellis, a heroic undertaking, achieved nobly. The translation of Wagner (and especially of these two books) is a task of extraordinary difficulty, and can never quite seem to have been wholly concluded. Wagner's prose, his earlier prose particularly, is clouded by the smoke of German metaphysics and contorted by the ruthless conscientiousness of the German temperament. He will leave nothing unsaid, even if there is no possible way of saying clearly what he wants to say. And he does somehow say things that have never been said before, or never from so near the roots. Often he says them picturesquely, always truthfully, energetically, and, above all, logically; rarely with much ease or charm. He is terribly in earnest, and words are things to be used for their precise and honest uses. He takes them captive, thrusts them together from the ends

of the earth, and lets the chains clank between them. It is therefore not to be expected that even Mr. Ellis, with his knowledge, skill, and patience, should have been able to make Wagner always what is called readable: and in his admirable fidelity to the sense and words of the original, there are times (especially in those difficult early volumes) when what we read may indeed be strictly related to the German text, but can hardly be said to be strictly English. With a courtesy for which one has little precedent, he has permitted me on occasion to modify a word here and there in my quotations. The permission was unconditional: my use of it has been infrequent, but, I think, requires explanation.

In *The Art-work of the Future* Wagner defines art as "an immediate vital act," the expression of man, as man is the expression of nature. "The first and truest fount of Art reveals itself in the impulse that urges from Life into the work of art; for it is the impulse to bring the unconscious, instinctive principle of Life to understanding and acknowledgment as Necessity." "Art is an inbred craving of the natural, genuine, and uncorrupted man," not an artificial product, and not a product of mind only, which produces science, but of that deeper impulse which is unconscious. From this unconscious impulse, this need, come all great creations, all great inventions; conscious intellect does but exploit and splinter those direct impulses which come straight from the people. The people alone can feel "a common and collective want"; without this want there can be no need; without need no necessary action; where there is no necessary action, caprice enters, and caprice is the mother of all unnaturalness. Out of caprice, or an imagined need, come luxury, fashion, and the whole art-traffic of our shameless

age. " Only from Life, from which alone can even the need for her grow up, can Art obtain her matter and her form ; but where Life is modelled upon fashion, Art can never fashion anything from Life."

In his consideration of art Wagner sets down two broad divisions : art as derived directly from man, and art as shaped by man from the stuff of nature. In the first division he sets dance (or motion), tone, and poetry, in which man is himself the subject and agent of his own artistic treatment ; in the second, architecture, sculpture, and painting, in which man " extends the longing for artistic portrayal to the objects of surrounding, allied, ministering Nature."

The ground of all human art is bodily motion. Into bodily motion comes rhythm, which is " the mind of dance and the skeleton of tone." Tone is " the heart of man, through which dance and poetry are brought to mutual understanding." This organic being is " clothed upon with the flesh of the world." Thus, in the purely human arts, we rise from bodily motion to poetry, to which man adds himself as singer and actor ; and we have at once the lyric art-work out of which comes the perfected form of lyric drama. This, as he conceives it, is to arise when " the pride of all three arts in their own self-sufficiency shall break to pieces and pass over into love for one another." Attempts, it is true, have been made to combine them, conspicuously in opera ; but the failure of opera comes from " a compact of three egoisms," without mutual giving as well as taking.

The limits of dance are evident ; mere motion can go no further than pantomime and ballet. What then are the limits of tone ? Harmony is the unbounded sea ; rhythm and melody, in which dance and poetry regain their own true essence, are the limiting shores to this unbounded sea. Yet,

within the confines of these shores, the sea is for ever tossing, for ever falling back upon itself. Christianity first set bounds to it with words, " the toneless, fluid, scattering word of the Christian creed." When the limits of this narrow word were broken, and the sea again let loose, an arbitrary measure was set upon it from without, counterpoint, " the mathematics of feeling," the claim of tone to be an end in itself, unrelated to nature, a matter of the intellect instead of a voice of the heart. Life, however, was never extinct, for there arose the folk-tune, with its twin-born folk-song ; which, however, was seized upon by the makers of music and turned into the " aria " ; " not the beating heart of the nightingale, but only its warbling throat." Then, out of that unending source, bodily motion, expressed in the rhythm of the dance, came the final achievement of instrumental music, the symphony, which is made on the basis of the harmonised dance. Beethoven carries instrumental music to the verge of speech, and there pauses ; then, in the Ninth Symphony, in which he calls in the word, " redeems music out of her own peculiar element into the realm of universal art." Beyond what Beethoven has there done with music, " no further step is possible, for upon it the perfect art-work of the future alone can follow, the universal drama to which he has forged for us the key."

But poetry, has that also its limits ? Literary poetry still exists, even the literary drama, written, as Goethe wrote it, from outside, as by one playing on a lifeless instrument ; even " the unheard-of, drama written for dumb reading ! " But poetry was once a living thing, a thing spoken and sung ; it arose from the midst of the people, and was kept alive by them, alike as epic, lyric, and drama. " Tragedy flourished for just so long as it was inspired by the spirit of the people,"

and, at its greatest moment, among the Greeks, " the poetic purpose rose singly to life upon the shoulders of the arts of dance and tone, as the head of the full-fledged human being." Where we see tragedy supreme in Shakespeare and music supreme in Beethoven we see two great halves of one universal whole. It remains for the art of the future to combine these two halves in one ; and, in the process of joining, all the other arts, those arts not derived directly from man but shaped by man from the stuff of nature, will find their place, as they help towards the one result.

The sections which follow, dealing with architecture, sculpture, and painting, form a special pleading to which it is hardly necessary to give much attention. Each art may indeed legitimately enough be utilised in the production and performance of such an art-work as Wagner indicates, and as he actually produced and performed ; architecture building the theatre, sculpture teaching man his own bodily beauty, and the beauty and significance of his grouping and movement on the stage, and painting creating a landscape which shall seem to set this human figure in the midst of nature itself. In going further than this, in asserting that sculpture is to give place to the human body, and painting to limit itself to the imitation of nature as a background of stage-scenery for the actor, we see the German.[1] We see also the propagandist, who has a doctrine to prove ; perhaps the enthusiast, who has convinced himself of what he desires to

[1] A more temperate, indeed a wholly just view of the relations of the plastic arts, is to be found in the " Letter to Liszt on the proposed Goethe Institute," written in 1851 (*Prose Works*, iii. 19-20), where Wagner points out the necessity of the due and helpful subordination of painting and sculpture to architecture in any complete and living organism of plastic art.

believe. In his conclusion of the whole matter he goes one step further, and identifies the poet and the performer ; then finds in the performer " the fellowship of all the artists," and, in that fellowship, the community of the people, who, having felt the want, have found out the way. " The perfectly artistic performer is therefore the unit man extended to the essence of the human species by the utmost evolution of his own particular nature. The place in which this wondrous process comes to pass is the theatric stage; the collective art-work which it brings to the light of day, the Drama."

In a letter to Berlioz, written in 1860, Wagner reminds his critic, who has chosen to fasten upon him the title " Music of the Future " (the hostile invention of a Professor Bischoff of Cologne), that the essay was written at a time when " a violent crisis in his life " (the Revolution of 1848, and his exile from Germany) had for a time withdrawn him from the practice of his art. " I asked myself," he says, " what position Art should occupy towards the public, so as to inspire it with a reverence that should never be profaned ; and, not to be merely building castles in the air, I took my stand on the position which art once occupied towards the public life of the Greeks." In the thirty thousand Greeks assembled to listen to a tragedy of Æschylus he found the one ideal public ; and, in the whole situation, a suggestion towards an art which should be no pedantic revival of that, but a similar union of the arts, in the proportions demanded by their present condition and by the present condition of the world. For, as no one has realised more clearly, there is no absolute art-work ; but each age must have its own art-work, as that of the preceding age ceases to be living and becomes monumental. " The Shakespeare who can

alone be of value to us is the ever new creative poet who, now and in all ages, is to that age what Shakespeare was to his own age."

Opera and Drama, which closely followed *The Art-work of the Future*, was written at Zurich in four months; it fills 376 large pages in Mr. Ellis's translation. In a letter to Uhlig, written January 20, 1851, Wagner says, "The first part is the shortest and easiest, perhaps also the most entertaining; the second goes deeper, and the third goes right to the bottom." In the dedication to the second edition, written in 1868, he says, "My desire to get to the bottom of the matter and to shirk no detail that, in my opinion, might make the difficult subject of æsthetic analysis intelligible to simple feeling betrayed me into a stubbornness of style which, to the reader who looks merely for entertainment, and is not directly interested in the subject itself, is extremely likely to seem a bewildering diffuseness." And the translator confesses that no other of Wagner's prose works has given him half so much difficulty as the third and portions of the second part of *Opera and Drama*; for in them, as he says, "we are presented with a theory absolutely in the making."

Opera and Drama is an attempt to state, in minute particulars, what *The Art-work of the Future* stated in general terms. It is based upon a demonstration of the fundamental error in the construction of opera: "that a means of expression (music) has been made the end, while the end of expression (drama) has been made a means." How fatal have been the results of this fundamental error can be realised only when it is seen how many of the greater musicians have thus spent their best energies in exploring a labyrinth which does but lead back, through many vain wanderings, to the starting-point.

The musical basis of opera was the *aria*, i.e. " the folk-song as rendered by the art-singer before the world of rank and quality, but with its word-poem left out and replaced by the product of the art-poet to that end composed." The performer was rightly the basis of the performance, but a basis set awry ; for the performer was chosen only for his dexterity in song, not for his skill as an actor. Dance and dance-tune, " borrowed just as waywardly from the folk-dance and its tune as was the operatic *aria* from the folk-song, joined forces with the singer in all the sterile immiscibility of unnatural things." Between these alien elements a shifting plank-bridge was thrown across, recitative, which is no more than the intoning of the Church, fixed by ritual into " an arid resemblance to, without the reality of, speech," and varied a little by musical caprice for the convenience of opera.

This unsound structure was untouched by the theory and practice of Gluck, whose " revolution " was no more than a revolt on the part of the composer against the domination of the singer. The singer was made to render more faithfully the music which the composer set before him ; but the poet " still looked up to the composer with the deepest awe," and no nearer approach was made to drama. In Spontini we see the logical filling out of the fixed forms of opera to their fullest extent. Along these lines nothing further can be done ; it is for the poet to step into the place usurped by the musician. The poet did nothing, but still continued to work to order, not once daring to pursue a real dramatic aim. He contented himself with stereotyped phrases, the make-believe of rhetoric, straitened to the measure of the musician's fixed forms, knowing that to make his characters speak " in brief and definite terms, surcharged with meaning," would have caused his instant dismissal. Thus music,

as such in the nature of things can only be expression, is seen endeavouring to fill the place of that which is to be expressed, to be itself its own object. "Such a music is no longer any music, but a fantastic hybrid emanation from poetry and music, which, in truth, can only materialise itself as caricature."

Mozart's importance in the history of opera is this, that, taking the forms as he found them, he filled them with living music, setting whatever words were given him, and giving those words "the utmost musical expression of which their last particle of sense was capable." Had Mozart met a poet who could have given him the foundation for his musical interpretation, he would have solved the problem for himself, unconsciously, by mere sincerity to his genius for musical expression.

After Mozart, in whom form was nothing and the musical spirit everything, came imitators who fancied they were imitating Mozart when they copied his form. It was Rossini who showed how hollow that form really was, and he did so by reducing *aria*, the essence of opera, to its own real essence, melody. In the folk-song words and tune had always grown together; in the opera there had been always some pretence of characterisation. Rossini abandoned everything but just "naked, ear-delighting, absolute melody," a delicious meaningless sound. "What reflection and æsthetic speculation had built up, Rossini's opera melodies pulled down and blew into nothing, like a baseless dream." Rossini gave every one what he wanted. He gave the singer what he wanted, display; and the player what he wanted, again display; and the poet a long rest, and leave to rhyme as he chose. Above all he gave the public what it wanted: not the people, but that public which need

only be named to be realised, the modern opera public. " With Rossini the real life-history of the opera comes to an end. It was at an end when the unconscious seedling of its being had evolved to naked and conscious bloom."

The one genuine, yet futile, attempt to produce living opera was the attempt of Weber, who saw in opera only melody, and who went to the true source, to the folk-song, for his melody. But he saw only the flower of the woods, and plucked it, taking it where it could but fade and die, because it had lost the sustenance of its root. On his heels came Auber, and then Rossini himself, who pilfered national melodies and stuck them together like a dressmaker giving variety to an old dress. The chorus came forward, and played at being the people ; and there was " a motley, conglomerate surrounding, without a centre to surround." Music tried to be outlandish, to express nothing, but in a more uncommon way. Opera became French, and, partly through a misunderstanding of Beethoven, neo-romantic.

Until Beethoven had done what he did, no one could have been quite certain " that the expression of an altogether definite, a clearly intelligible individual content, was in truth impossible in this language that had only fitted itself for conveying the general character of an emotion " : the language, that is, of absolute music. Beethoven attempts " to reach the artistically necessary within an inartistically impossible " ; he chooses, in music, a form which " often seems the mere capricious venting of a whim, and which, loosed from any purely musical cohesion, is only bound together by the bond of a poetic purpose impossible to render into music with full poetic plainness." Thus, much of his later work seems to be so many sketches for a picture which he could never make visible in all its outlines.

What in Beethoven was a " struggle for the discovery of a new basis of musical language " has been seized upon by later composers only in its external contrasts, excesses, inarticulate voices of joy and despair, and made the basis of a wholly artificial construction, in which " a programme reciting the heads of some subject taken from nature or human life was put into the hearer's hands ; and it was left to his imaginative talent to interpret, in keeping with the hint once given, all the musical freaks that one's unchecked license might now let loose in motley chaos." Berlioz seized upon what was most chaotic in the sketchwork of Beethoven, and, using it as a misunderstood magic symbol, called unnatural visions about him. " What he had to say to people was so wonderful, so unwonted, so entirely unnatural, that he could never have said it out in homely, simple words ; he needed a huge array of the most complicated machines in order to proclaim, by the help of many-wheeled and delicately-adjusted mechanism, what a simple human organism could not possibly have uttered, just because it was so entirely unhuman. . . . Each height and depth of this mechanism's capacity has Berlioz explored, with the result of developing a positively astounding knowledge ; and, if we mean to recognise the inventors of our present industrial machinery as the benefactors of modern State-humanity, then we must worship Berlioz as the veritable saviour of our world of absolute music ; for he has made it possible to musicians to produce the most wonderful effect from the emptiest and most inartistic content of their music-making, by an unheard-of marshalling of mere mechanical means."

In Berlioz, Wagner admits, " there dwelt a genuine artistic stress," but Berlioz was but a " tragic sacrifice." His orchestra was annexed by the opera-composer ; and its

" splintered and atomic melodies " were now lifted from the orchestra into the voice itself. The result was Meyerbeer, who, when Wagner wrote, could be alluded to, without need of naming, as the most famous opera-composer of modern times.

Weber, in *Euryanthe*, had endeavoured in vain to make a coherent dramatic structure out of two contradictory elements, " absolute, self-sufficing melody and unflinchingly true dramatic expression." Meyerbeer attempted the same thing from the standpoint of effect, and with the aid of the Rossini melody. Thus, while " Weber wanted a drama that could pass with all its members, with every scenic *nuance*, into his noble soulful melody, Meyerbeer, on the contrary, wanted a monstrous piebald, historico-romantic, diabolico-religious, fanatico-libidinous, sacro-frivolous, mysterio-criminal, auto-lyco-sentimental, dramatic hotch-potch, therein to find material for a curious chimeric music—a want which, owing to the indomitable buckram of his musical temperament, could never be quite suitably supplied."

In his summing-up of the whole discussion on opera and the nature of music, Wagner tells us that the secret of the barrenness of modern music lies in this, that music is a woman who gives birth but does not beget. " Just as the living folk-melody is inseparable from the living folk-poem, at pain of organic death, so can music's organism never bear the true, the living melody, except it first be fecundated by the poet's thought. Music is the bearing woman, the poet the begetter; and music had therefore reached the pinnacle of madness when she wanted not only to bear, but to beget." He now turns, therefore, to the poet.

The second part of *Opera and Drama* is concerned with *The Play, and the Nature of Dramatic Poetry*. Wagner first

clears the way for his theory by pointing out that when Lessing, in his "Laocoon," mapped out the boundaries of the arts, he was concerned, in poetry, only with that art as a thing to be read, even when he touches on drama; and that, figuring it as addressed wholly to the imagination, not to the sight and hearing, he was rightly anxious only to preserve its purity; that is, to make it as easy as possible for the imagination to grasp it. But, just as the piano is an abstract and toneless reduction backward through the organ, the stringed instrument, and the wind instrument, from the "oldest, truest, most beautiful organ of music," the human voice, so, if we trace back the literary drama, or indeed any form of poetry, we shall find its origin in the tone of human speech, which is one and the same with the singing tone.

Modern drama has a twofold origin: through Shakespeare from the romance, and through Racine from misunderstood Greek tragedy. At the time of the Renaissance poetry was found in the narrative poem, which had culminated in the fantastic romance of Ariosto. To this fantastic romance Shakespeare gave inner meaning and outward show; he took the inconsequential and unlimited stage of the mummers and mystery-players, narrowed his action to the limits of the spectator's attention, but, through the conditions of that stage, left the representation of the scene to the mind's eye, and thus left open a door to all that was vague and unlimited in romance and history. In France and Italy the drama, played, not before the people, but in princes' palaces, was copied externally from ancient drama. A fixed scene was taken as its first requirement, and thus an endeavour was made to construct from without inwards, "from mechanism to life": talk on the scene, action behind the scene. Drama passed over into opera, which was thus "the premature

bloom on an unripe fruit, grown from an unnatural, artificial soil."

It was in Germany, in whose soil the drama has never taken root, that a mongrel thing, which is still rampant on the European stage, came into being. When Shakespeare was brought over to Germany, where the opera was already in possession of the stage, an attempt was made to actualise his scenes, upon which it was discovered that dramatised history or romance was only possible so long as the scene need only be suggested. In the attempt to actualise Shakespeare's mental pictures, all the resources of mechanism were employed in vain ; and the plays themselves were cut and altered in order to bring them within the range of a possible realistic representation. It was seen that the drama of Shakespeare could only be realised under its primitive conditions, with the scene left wholly to the imagination. Embodied, it became, so far as embodiment was possible, " an unsurveyable mass of realisms and actualisms."

It therefore remained evident that the nature of romance can never wholly correspond with the nature of drama ; that, as an art in which drama was at once its inner essence and its embodied representation, the drama of Shakespeare remained, as a form, imperfect. The result of this consciousness was that the poet either wrote literary dramas for reading, or attempted an artificial reconstruction of the antique. Such was the drama of Goethe and Schiller. Goethe, after repeated attempts, produces his only organic work in *Faust*, which is dramatic only in form, and in *William Meister*, which returns frankly to romance. Schiller " hovers between heaven and earth " in an attempt to turn history into romance and romance into classical drama. Both, and all that resulted from both, prove " that our literary

drama is every whit as far removed from the genuine drama as the pianoforte from the symphonic song of human voices ; that in the modern drama we can arrive at the production of poetry only by the most elaborate devices of literary mechanism, just as on the pianoforte we only arrive at the production of music through the most complicated devices of technical mechanism—in either case, a soulless poetry, a toneless music."

The stuff of the modern drama, then, being romance, what is the difference between this romance and the myth which was the stuff of ancient Greek drama ? Myth Wagner defines as " the poem of a life-view in common," the instinctive creation of the imagination of primitive man working upon his astonished and uncomprehending view of natural phenomena. " The incomparable thing about the *mythos* is that it is true for all time, and its content, how close soever its compression, is inexhaustible throughout the ages." The poet's business was merely to expound the myth by expressing it in action, an action which should be condensed and unified from it, as it, in its turn, has been a condensation and unification of the primitive view of nature.

The romance of the Middle Ages is derived from the mingling of two mythic cycles, the Christian legend and the Germanic saga. Christian legend can only present pictures, or, transfigured by music, render moments of ecstasy, which must remain " blends of colour without drawing." The essence of drama is living action, in its progress towards a clearly defined end ; whereas Christianity, being a passage through life to the transfiguration of death, " must perforce begin with the storm of life, to weaken down its movement to the final swoon of dying out." The Germanic saga begins with a myth older than Christianity, then, when Christianity

has seized upon it, becomes " a swarm of actions whose true idea appears to us unfathomable and capricious, because their motives, resting on a view of life quite alien to the Christian's, had been lost to the poet." Foreign stuffs are patched upon it ; and it becomes wholly unreal and outlandish, a medley of adventures, from whose imaginary pictures, however, men turned to track them in reality, by voyages of discovery, and by the scientific discoveries of the intellect. Nature, meanwhile, unchanged, awaits a new interpretation.

The first step in this interpretation is to seize and represent actual things as they are, individually. History comes forward with a more bewildering mass of material than fancy had ever found for itself ; and from this tangle of conditions and surroundings the essence of the man is to be unravelled. This can be done by the romance writer, not by the dramatist. The drama, which is organic, presupposes all those surroundings which it is the business of the romance writer to develop before us. The romance writer works from without inwards, the dramatist from within outwards. And now, going one step further, and turning to actual life as it exists before our eyes, the poet can no longer " extemporise artistic fancies " ; he can only render the whole horror of what lies naked before him ; " he needs only to feel pity, and at once his passion becomes a vital force." Actual things draw him out of the contemplation of actual things ; the poem turns to journalism, the stuff of poetry becomes politics.

It was Napoleon who said to Goethe that, in the modern world, politics play the part of fate in the ancient world. " The Greek Fate is the inner nature-necessity, from which the Greek—because he did not understand it—sought refuge in the arbitrary political state. Our Fate is the arbitrary political state, which to us shows itself as an outer necessity

for the maintenance of society ; and from this we seek refuge in the nature-necessity, because we have learnt to understand the latter, and have recognised it as the conditionment of our being and all its shapings." In the myth of Œdipus is seen a prophetic picture of the " whole history of mankind from the beginnings of society to the inevitable downfall of the state." The modern state is a necessity of an artificial and inorganic kind ; it is not, as society (arising from the family, and working through love rather than through law) should rightly be, " the free self-determining of the individuality." Within these artificial bounds of the state only thought is free ; and the poet who would render the conflict of the individual and of the state must content himself with appealing to the understanding ; he cannot appeal to the understanding through the feeling. Dramatic art is " the emotionalising of the intellect," for, in drama, the appeal is made directly to the senses and can completely realise its aim. " In drama, therefore, an action can only be explained when it is completely justified by the feeling ; and it is thus the dramatic poet's task not to invent actions but to make an action so intelligible through its emotional necessity that we may altogether dispense with the intellect's assistance in its justification. The poet, therefore, has to make his main scope the choice of the action, which he must so choose that, alike in its character and in its compass, it makes possible to him its entire justification by the feeling, for in this justification alone resides the reaching of his aim." This action he cannot find in the present, where the fundamental relations are no longer to be seen in their simple and natural growth ; nor in the past, as recorded by history, where an action can only become intelligible to us through a detailed explanation of its surroundings. It must be found in a new creation of

myth, and this myth must arise from a condensation into one action of the image of all man's energy, together with his recognition of his own mood in nature, nature apprehended, not in parts by the understanding, but as a whole by the feeling. This strengthening of a moment of action can only be achieved " by lifting it above the ordinary human measure through the poetic figment of wonder." " Poetic wonder is the highest and most necessary product of the artist's power of beholding and displaying. . . . It is the fullest understanding of Nature that first enables the poet to set her phenomena before us in wondrous shaping : for only in such shaping do they become intelligible to us as the conditionments of human actions intensified." The motives which tend towards this supreme moment of action are to be condensed and absorbed into one ; and from this one motive- " all that savours of the particular and accidental must be taken away, and it must be given its full truth as a necessary, purely human utterance of feeling."

Only in tone-speech can this fully realised utterance of feeling be made. Modern speech, alike in prose and in the modern form of verse, in which " Stabreim," or the root alliteration by which words were once fused with melody, has given place to end-rhyme (" fluttering at the loose ends of the ribands of melody "), is no longer able to speak to the feeling, but only to the understanding, and this through a convention by which we " dominate our feelings that we may demonstrate to the understanding an aim of the understanding." Speech, therefore, has shrunk to " absolute intellectual speech," as music has shrunk to " absolute tone speech." The poet can thus only adequately realise his " strengthened moments of action " by a speech proportionately raised above its habitual methods of expression. Tone-

speech is this " new, redeeming, and realising tongue " ; tone-speech not separately made, an emotional expression ungoverned by this aim (as we see it in modern opera), but tone-speech which is the fullest expression of this aim, and thus " the expression of the most deeply roused human feelings, according to their highest power of self-expression."

Wagner now passes, in the third part, to a consideration of *The Arts of Poetry and Tone in the Drama of the Future.* He begins by pointing out in minute detail, through the physiology of speech (the actual making of speech by breath), that it is only from a heightening of ordinary speech, and not from the recognised prosody of verse, that we can hope to find the means of ultimate expression ; and that, our language having lost all direct means of emotional appeal, we must go back to its very roots before we can fit it to combine with that tone-speech which does possess such an appeal. He shows that the metre of Greek choric verse can only properly be understood by taking into account its musical accompaniment, by which a long-held note could be justified to the ear. That these lyrics were written to fixed tunes, tunes probably fixed by dance movements, is evident from the great elaboration of a rhythm which could never have arisen directly out of the substance of poems so largely grave and philosophic. The oldest lyric arises out of tone and melody, in which human emotion at first uttered itself in the mere breathing of the vowels, then through the individualisation of the vowels by consonants. In a word-root we have not only the appeal to thought of that root's meaning, but also the sensuous appeal of the open sound which is its " sensuous body " and primal substance. Tone, with its appeal to feeling, begins by passing into the word, with its appeal to the understanding ; the final return is that of the word, through harmony, to that

tone-speech in which the understanding is reached through the feeling, and both are satisfied.

Primitive melodies rarely modulate from one key into another; and, if we wish to address the feeling intelligibly through tone alone, we must return to this simplicity of key. This Beethoven did in the melody to which he set Schiller's verse in the Ninth Symphony; but if we compare this, in its original form, with the broad melodic structure of the musical setting of the line, "Seid umschlungen, Millionen!" we shall see the whole difference between a melody which is made separately and, so to speak, laid upon the verse, and a melody which grows directly out of the verse itself. It is the poetic aim which causes and justifies modulation, for by it the change and gradation of emotion can be rendered intelligible to the feeling. Harmony is "the bearing element which takes up the poetic aim solely as a begetting seed, to shape it into finished semblance by the prescripts of its own, its womanly organism." Modern music has taken harmony as sufficient in itself, and by so doing has but "worked bewilderingly and benumbingly upon the feeling." The tone-poet must, instead, add to a melody, conditioned by its speaking verse, the harmony implicitly contained therein. Now "harmony is in itself a thing of thought; to the senses it becomes first actually discernible as polyphony, or, to define it still more closely, as polyphonic symphony." This, for the purposes of the drama, cannot be supplied by vocal symphony, because each voice, in a perfectly proportioned action, can but be the expression of an individual character, present on the stage for his own ends, and not as a mere vocal support for others. "Only in the full tide of lyric outpour, when all the characters and their surroundings have been strictly led up to a joint expression of feeling, is there offered

to the tone-poet a polyphonic mass of voices to which he may make over the declaration of his harmony." Only by the orchestra can it find expression, for the orchestra is "the realised thought" of harmony.

The timbre of the human voice can never absolutely blend with that of any instrument; it is the duty of the orchestra to subordinate itself to, and support, the vocal melody, never actually mingling with it. The orchestra possesses a distinct faculty of speech, "the faculty of uttering the unspeakable," or rather that which, to our intellect, is the unspeakable. This faculty it possesses in common with gesture, which expresses something that cannot be expressed in words. The orchestra expresses to the ear what gesture expresses to the eye, and both combined carry on or lead up to what the verse-melody expresses in words. It is able to transform thought ("the bond between an absent and a present emotion") into an actually present emotion. "Music cannot think, but she can materialise thoughts. A musical motive can produce a definite impression on the feeling, inciting it to a function akin to thought, only when the emotion uttered in that motive has been definitely conditioned by a definite object and proclaimed by a definite individual before our very eyes." The orchestra, then, can express foreboding or remembrance, and it can do this with perfect clearness and direct appeal to the emotions by the recurrence of a musical motive which we have already associated with a definite emotion, or whose significance is interpreted to us by a definite gesture. What has been called tone-painting in instrumental music is an attempt to do this by the suggestion of tones, or with the aid of a written programme; in either case by a "chilling" appeal to mere fancy in place of feeling. "The life-giving focus of dramatic

expression is the verse-melody of the performer; towards it the absolute orchestral melody leads on, as a foreboding; from it is led the instrumental-motive's 'thought,' as a remembrance." In order to arrive at perfect unity of form and content there must be something more than a mere juxtaposition of poetic and musical expression, or the musician will have roused a feeling in vain, and the poet will have failed to fix this feeling incompletely roused. Unity can be secured only when the expression fully renders the content, and renders it unceasingly; and this can be done only when the poet's aim and the musician's expression are so blended that neither can be distinguished from the other, "the chief motives of the dramatic action, having become distinguishable melodic moments which fully materialise their content, being moulded into a continuous" texture, binding the whole art-work together, and, in the final result, the orchestra so completely "guiding our whole attention away from itself as a means of expression, and directing it to the object expressed," that, in a sense, it shall not "be heard at all." Thus, at its height of realised achievement, "art conceals art."

iii

This, then, was the task to which Wagner addressed himself; this was his ideal, and this remains his achievement. We have seen how wholly the theory was an outcome of the work itself; and Wagner assures us that he brought on "a fit of brain cramp" by his endeavour to "treat as a theorem a thing which had become quite clear and certain to him in his artistic intention and production." The theory came out of the preliminary labour at what afterwards became

the " Ring des Nibelungen." It was in the midst of that long labour that, as we know, he stopped to write *Tristan*; we know now, since the publication of the letters to Mathilde Wesendonck, why he stopped, and why he " clean forgot every theory " in the calm fever of that creation, " to such an extent that during the working out I myself was aware of how far I had outstripped my system."

What Coleridge said of Wordsworth may be applied even more fitly to Wagner: " He had, like all great artists, to create the taste by which he was to be realised, to teach the art by which he was to be seen and judged." Thus we see him first of all explaining himself to himself before he explains himself to the world; and, in this final explanation, giving no place to the thinker's vanity in thought or the artist's in self-consciousness, but making an appeal for help, a kind of persistent expostulation. Wagner wanted people to understand him in order that they might carry out his ideas, that particular part of his ideas which he was powerless to carry out without their aid. He was creating the " art-work of the future," the work itself which he had once dreamed was to be the spontaneous and miraculous outcome of his ideal " community "; he still wanted to make that community come to him; he believed in it until belief was quite worn out; and we see him, in essay after essay, expecting less and less, as revolution has brought it no nearer to him, and " German policy " has brought it no nearer. At last he sees only two possibilities: one, a private association of art-loving men and women, and he doubts if enough lovers of art are to be found; the other, a German prince, who would devote his opera-budget to the creation of a national art. " Will this prince be found? " he asks, not expecting an answer; and he adds: " Patience and long-suffering

have worn me out. I no longer hope to live out the production of my 'Bühnenfestspiel.'" This is in 1863. The prince was at hand: "for it was indeed a king who called to me in chaos: 'Hither! Complete thy work! I will it!'"

What was begun in 1864 by King Ludwig of Bavaria had to wait many years for its completion; and that completion was to come about by the additional help of a private association of art-lovers, of whose existence Wagner had doubted. Nothing ever came from any "community"; and Wagner, like all other believers in "the people," had to realise in the end that art, in our days, can be helped only by a few powerful individuals: a king, a popular favourite like Liszt, an enthusiastic woman like the Countess von Schleinitz. In the modern world money is power; and with money even Bayreuth may be forced upon the world. It must be forced upon it; it will not be chosen; afterwards, the thing once done, the public will follow; for the public, like the work itself, has to be created. Having failed to produce his art-work with the help of the public, Wagner proceeded to produce a public with the help of the art-work. He built Bayreuth for the production of his own works in his own way, and arranged, down to the minutest details, the manner of their representation.

Few of Wagner's theories were not the growth of many times and many ideas. The idea, or first glimpse, of Bayreuth itself may perhaps be found, as Mr. Ashton Ellis finds it, in a flourish of mere rhetoric in one of Berlioz's articles in the *Gazette Musicale*, which Wagner caught up in one of his own articles of that year (1841): "So Berlioz lately dreamed of what he would do were he one of those unfortunate beings who pay five hundred francs for the singing of a romance

not worth five sous ; he would take the finest orchestra in the world to the ruins of Troy to play to him the Sonfonia Eroica." It had always been Wagner's desire that all the seats in his theatre should be equalised, and, if possible, that they should be free. It was not possible ; and the uniform price of seats had to be a high one ; but in the " stipendiary fund," formed at Wagner's express wish, not long before his death (by which free seats and travelling expenses are still given to a certain number of poor musicians), we find some approximation towards his original desire. The advisability of the form of the amphitheatre, with its consequent equalising of seats and prices, had been discerned by Wagner at least as early as 1851, when, in *A Communication to my Friends*, he describes the modern opera-house, with its threefold and mutually contradictory appeal to the gallery, the pit, and the boxes, " the vulgar, the Philistine, and the exquisite, thrown into one common pot."

But it was a need even more fundamental which finally brought about the exact shape of the Bayreuth theatre : the need, whose importance gradually grew upon him, of having the orchestra out of sight, and sunk below the level of the stage. The first consciousness of this need is seen in one of those *feuilletons*, written in 1840 or 1841, which Wagner afterwards brought together under the title, *A German Musician in Paris*. Here he comments, in passing, on the distraction and unloveliness of " seeing music as well as hearing it," and on the amazing people who like to sit as near the orchestra as possible in order to watch the movements of the fiddles and to wait on the next beat of the kettle-drum. In 1849, in *The Artwork of the Future*, he symbolises the orchestra as " the loan of endless universal feeling," from which renewed strength is to be drawn, as Antæus drew a renewal of strength from

contact with the earth. As such, and " by its essence diametrically opposed to the scenic landscape which surrounds the actor," it is, " as to locality, most rightly placed in the deepened foreground outside the scenic frame," to which it forms " the perfect complement," the under-current.

In the preface to the poem of *The Ring* (1863), in which the Bayreuth idea is definitely proposed, Wagner dwells in more detail on the advantages of an invisible orchestra. In 1873, in the " report " on Bayreuth, he points out how the desire to render the mechanical means of the music invisible had led step by step to the transformation of the whole auditorium. As the first necessity was that the orchestra should be sunk so deep that no one in the audience could look down into it, it was evident that the seats would have to be arranged tier above tier, in gradually ascending rows, " their ultimate height to be governed solely by the possibility of a distinct view of the scenic picture." In order to frame in the empty space between the stage and the first row of seats (" the mystic gulf," as Wagner called it, because it had to divide the real from the ideal world), a second wider proscenium was set up, which threw back the stage picture into a further depth (as Whistler would have easel pictures thrown back into the depths of the frame, " the frame being the window through which the painter looks at his model "). A difficulty, caused by the side-walls of the auditorium, suggested a further development of this scheme ; and proscenium after proscenium was added through the whole interior, in the form of broadening rows of columns, which framed it into a single vista, widening gradually outwards from the stage. Thus, for the first time in the modern world, a literal " theatron," or looking-room, had been constructed,

solely for the purpose of looking, and of looking in one direction only.

Wagner's attitude towards the public was never intentionally an autocratic one. His whole conception of art was unselfish, never in any narrow sense " art for art's sake," but art concealing art for the joy of the world. Certainly no one in modern times has longed so ardently, or laboured so hard, that the whole world might see itself transfigured in art and might rejoice in that transfiguration. Is not his whole aim that of universal art ? and can art be universal except through universality of delight ? His dissatisfaction with the performances of his own works in the ordinary theatres arose from the impossibility of directly addressing the actual feeling of the public through those conditions. When one of his operas has at last had a clamorous success, he is dissatisfied, because he is conscious that its meaning has not been rightly apprehended. He does not want to be admired, as strange things are admired ; but to be understood, and, being understood, to be loved, and thus to become a living bond between art and the world. In a footnote to *Opera and Drama* he says emphatically :—" By this term, the public, I can never think of those units who employ their abstract art-intelligence to make themselves familiar with things which are never realised upon the stage. By the public I mean that assemblage of spectators without any specifically cultivated art-understanding, to whom the represented drama should come for their complete, their entirely toilless, emotional understanding ; spectators, therefore, whose interest should never be led to the mere art media employed, but solely to the artistic object realised thereby, to the drama as a represented action, intelligible to every one. Since the public, then, is to enjoy without the slightest effort of an art-intelligence, its

claims are grievously slighted when the performance does not realise the dramatic aim." Bayreuth is the endeavour to satisfy the legitimate, unrecognised, often disputed rights, not of the artist, as an outside solitary individual, but of the public, of which the artist is himself to become a sympathetic and more conscious member. Do we not here return, very significantly, to what seemed like words in the air in that conclusion of *The Art-work of the Future*, where the creative artist identifies himself with the performer, and the performer becomes, or typifies, " the unit man expanded to the essence of the human species " ?

iv

In the realising of this achievement, as we have seen from *The Art-work of the Future* and *Opera and Drama*, Wagner demanded, in the combination of the arts, two main factors : poetry, carried to its utmost limits in drama ; and music, carried to its utmost limits as the interpreter and deepener of dramatic action. In one of the admirable letters to Mathilde Wesendonck, Wagner delights quite frankly in the thought that no one could so fitly supplement Schopenhauer's theory of music, because, " there never was another man who was a poet and a musician at once." It is this double faculty which permitted him to achieve the whole of his aim, and it is through his possession of this double faculty that his ideas about music and about drama are almost equally significant and fundamental. We shall be more likely to realise their full meaning if we take them, not, as he generally insisted on taking them, together, but, as far as we can, separately ; and we will begin, as he began, with the foundation of his scheme, with drama.

Drama, " the one, indivisible, supreme creation of the mind of man," was, as we know, celebrated by the Greeks as a religious festival. Now, as in ancient Greece, the theatre is the chronicle and epitome of the age ; but with what a difference ! With us, in the most serious European countries, religion is forbidden to be dealt with on the stage ; " our evil conscience has so lowered the theatre in public estimation that it is the duty of the police to prevent the stage from meddling in the slightest degree with religion." What has killed art in the modern world is commercialism. " The rulership of public taste in art," says Wagner in *Opera and Drama*, " has passed over to the person . . . who orders the art-work for his money, and insists on ever novel variations of his one beloved theme, but at no price a new theme itself ; and this ruler and order-giver is the Philistine." " I simply take in view," he says in 1878, in his article on *The Public and Popularity*, " our public art-conditions of the day when I assert that it is impossible for anything to be truly good if it is to be reckoned in advance for presentation to the public, and if this intended presentation rules the author in his sketch and composition of an art-work." Thus the playwright has to endure " the sufferings of all the other artists turned into one," because what he creates can only become a work of art by " entering into open life," that is, by being seen on the open stage. " If the theatre is at all to answer to its high and natural mission it must be completely freed from the necessity of industrial speculation." For the playwright, therefore, a public is a necessary part of his stock-in-trade. The Greeks had it, supremely ; Shakespeare, Molière, had it ; but, though Wagner himself has violently conquered it for music, for drama it still remains unconquered.

Wagner points out the significant fact that from Æschylus to Molière, through Lope de Vega and Shakespeare, the great dramatic poet has always been himself an actor, or has written for a given company of actors. He points out how in Paris, where alone the stage has a measure of natural life, every *genre* has its theatre, and every play is written for a definite theatre. Here, then, is the very foundation of the dramatic art, which is only realised by the complete interdependence of poet and actor, the poet "forgetting himself" as he creates his poetry in terms of living men and women, and the actor divesting himself of self in carrying out the intentions of the poet. Wagner defines the Shakespearian drama as "a fixed mimetic improvisation of the highest poetic value," and he shows how, in order to rise to drama, poetry must stoop to the stage; it must cease to be an absolute thing, pure poetry, and must accept aid from life itself, from the actor who realises it according to its intention. The form of a Shakespeare play would be as unintelligible to us as that of a Greek play without our knowledge of the stage necessities which shaped both the one and the other. Neither, though both contain poetry which is supreme as poetry, took its form from poetry; neither is intelligible as poetic form. The actor's art is like "the life-dew in which the poetic aim was to be steeped, to enable it, as in a magic transformation, to appear as the mirror of life."

In the Greek play the chorus appeared in the orchestra, that is, in the midst of the audience, while the personages, masked and heightened, were seen in a ghostly illusion of grandeur on the stage. Shakespeare's stage is planted within the orchestra; his actors, who acted in the midst of the audience, had to be absolutely natural if they were not to be wholly ridiculous. We expect, since his time, no less of

nature from the actor, a power of illusion which must be absolute.

Man interprets or is the ape of nature; the actor is the ape of, and interprets man. He is "Nature's intermediate link through which that absolutely realistic mother of all being incites the ideal within us." And now Wagner takes his further step from drama into music, which he justifies, in one place, by representing the mirrored image of life, which is the play, "dipped in the magic spring of music, which frees it from all the realism of matter," and, in another place, by the affirmation: "What to Shakespeare was practically impossible, namely, to be the actor of all his parts, the tone-composer achieves with complete certainty, for out of each executant musician he speaks to us directly." Into these speculations we must not now follow him. One point, however, which he raises in a later footnote to *The Art-work of the Future,* has a significance, apart from his special intention, in its choice of music as a test or touchstone of drama. He imagines the playwright resenting the intrusion of music, and he asks him in return of what value can be "those thoughts and situations to which the lightest and most restrained accompaniment of music should seem importunate and burdensome"? Could there be a more essential test of drama, or a test more easily applied by a moment's thought? Think of any given play, and imagine a musical accompaniment of the closest kind. I can hear a music as of Mozart coming up like an atmosphere about Congreve's *Way of the World*, as easily as I can hear Beethoven's *Coriolan* overture leading in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Tolstoi's *Power of Darkness* is itself already a kind of awful tragic music; but would all of Ibsen go quite well to a musical setting? Conceive of music and Dumas *fils* together, and

remember that, rightly or wrongly, Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* has only succeeded on the stage since it has been completed by the musical interpretation of Debussy.

The root of all evil in modern art, and especially in the art of drama, Wagner finds to be the fact that " modern art is a mere product of culture, and not sprung from life itself." The drama written as literature, at a distance from the theatre, and with only a vague consciousness of the actor, can be no other than a lifeless thing, not answering to any need. The only modern German dramatic work in which there is any vitality, Goethe's *Faust* springs from the puppet-stage of the people ; but German actors are incapable of giving it, for the verse must be spoken with absolute naturalness, and the actor has lost the secret of speaking verse naturally. Thus the actor must be trained ; must be taught above all to speak. " Only actors can teach each other to speak ; and they would find their best help in sternly refusing to play bad pieces, that is, pieces which hinder them from entering that ecstasy which alone can ennoble their art." Wagner is never tired of proclaiming his debt to Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, who first inspired in him, he tells us, the desire to write music worthy of her singing. Was her voice so wonderful ? " No," answers Wagner ; " she had no ' voice ' at all ; but she knew how to use her breath so beautifully, and to let a true womanly soul stream forth in such wonderful sounds, that we never thought of either voice or singing. . . . All my knowledge of mimetic art," he goes on to say, " I owe to this great woman ; and through that teaching I can point to truthfulness as the foundation of that art."

Wagner's best service to drama, in his theories as in his

practice, is the insistence with which he has demonstrated the necessary basis of the play in the theatre. " The thorough ' stage-piece,' " he says, " in the modernest of senses, would assuredly have to form the basis, and the only sound one, of all future dramatic efforts." And not merely does he see that the play must be based upon the theatre, but that the particular play must be conditioned by the particular theatre. No one has seen more clearly the necessity of " tempering the artistic ends to be realised " to the actual " means of execution " which are at the artist's disposal. " Even the scantiest means are equal to realising an artistic aim, provided it rules itself for expression through these means." Thus there is not one among his many plans of theatre reform which has not some actual building in view, whether the Vienna Opera-house there visibly before him, or that " Bühnen-festspielhaus " which he saw no less clearly in his mind before the first stone of the foundation had been set in the earth at Bayreuth. And whenever he speaks of the theatre it is as of a kind of religious service and with a kind of religious awe, which, in one of the essays, bursts out into a flame of warning exultation. " If we enter a theatre," he says gravely, " with any power of insight, we look straight into a dæmonic abyss of possibilities, the lowest as well as the highest. . . . Here in the theatre the whole man, with his lowest and his highest passions, is placed in terrifying nakedness before himself, and by himself is driven to quivering joy, to surging sorrow, to hell and heaven. . . . In awe and shuddering have the greatest poets of all nations and of all times approached this terrible abyss," from whose brink those heavenly wizards are thrust back by the modern world, that they may give place to " the Furies of vulgarity, the sottish gnomes of dishonouring delights."

v

It has sometimes been said that there is a contradiction between Wagner's conception of music at various periods of his life ; and so in appearance there is, but only in appearance. The reading of Schopenhauer, at Zurich and Venice, during the composition of *Tristan and Isolde*, did indeed supply him with a complete theory, or what may be called a transcendental philosophy, of music, which he later on transferred to his book on Beethoven, developing it after his own fashion. It is true also that, in the more important of his previous writings, as in *Opera and Drama*, nothing had been said of any such transcendental view of music, music being treated indeed almost wholly in regard to its dependence upon words and action. But it must be remembered that Wagner was concerned only with a particular form of music, with dramatic music, and that he was arguing with a purpose, and to convince people, already attentive enough to music in itself, of certain new possibilities in its union with drama.

In Wagner's theoretical writing everything is a matter of focus ; that once established, nothing is seen except in relation to it. He is literally unable to see things in unrelated detail. This is why he is so impatient with " absolute " music in its modern developments, and with " absolute " literature, in more than Verlaine's sense, when he cries, " Et tout le reste est Littérature ! " That is why he is unable to consider a single question, the question of the Jews, of a Goethe institute, of musical criticism, without focussing it where the rays of thought will best converge upon it. Every idea comes to Wagner from circumstances. A king becomes his friend, and he sets himself to find out the inner and primal meaning of kinship. Long before, he had guessed at the

idea which he is only now able to develop out of the material actually under his hand; and it is thus no less with all his studies of race, religion, politics.

So, wholly concentrated upon one aspect of music, he may well have seemed to do somewhat less than justice to music itself; and the Beethoven book may seem like the sudden, odd, theoretical awakening of a musician to the whole greatness of his own art. It is therefore instructive to turn to one of those newspaper articles which Wagner wrote when he was in Paris in 1840 and 1841; and there we shall find, and in reference to Beethoven, a singularly clear anticipation of almost everything that he was afterwards to say on the inner meaning of music. Why, he asks, should people "take the useless trouble to confound the musical with the poetic tongue," seeing that "where the speech of man stops short, there music's reign begins?" Tone-painting, he admits, may be used in jest, but, in purely instrumental music, in no other sense, without ceasing to be humorous and becoming absurd. Where, he asks, in the Eroica Symphony, is "the Bridge of Lodi, where the battle of Arcole, where the victory under the Pyramids, where the 18th Brumaire?" These things would have been found set down in a "biographic symphony" of his time, as indeed we find them in biographic or autobiographic tone-poems of Richard Strauss in our time. But Beethoven saw Bonaparte, not as a general, but as a musician; "and in *his* domain he saw the sphere where he could bring to pass the self-same thing as Bonaparte in the plains of Italy." A mood in music, he admits, may be produced by no matter what external cause, for the musician is, after all, a man, and at the mercy of his temperament in its instinctive choice among the sounds in which he hears the footsteps of events. But these moods,

once profoundly set in motion, " when they force him to production, have already turned to music in him, so that, at the moment of creative inspiration, it is no longer the outer event that governs the composer, but the musical sensation which it has begotten in him." And, further, what music can express in her universal voice is not merely the joy, passion, or despair of the individual, but joy itself, or passion, or despair, raised to infinity, and purified by the very " semblance of the world." [1]

Do we not already see music, as Schopenhauer saw it, as " an idea of the world " ? and the musician " speaking the highest wisdom in a language his reason does not understand " ? It is in the wonderful book on Beethoven, written in 1870, that Wagner goes deepest into music as music, led by Schopenhauer, but going beyond him. He shows us Beethoven, surrounded by silence, like " a world walking among men " ; and he shows us how the action of music is to shut us off from the outer world, where we can dream, as it were, awake, redeemed from the strivings of the individual will, and at one with nature, with our inmost selves. Music, he shows us, blots out civilisation as the daylight blots out lamplight.

To this voice of nature in sound it seemed to Wagner that Beethoven had given as complete an interpretation as the human individual could give. What, then, he asks, remains for instrumental music to do ? If one refuses the help of what

[1] Note also that in 1857, in his letter on Liszt's Symphonic Poems, Wagner says : " Hear my creed : music can never and in no possible alliance cease to be the highest, the redeeming art. It is of her nature that what all the other arts but hint at, through her and in her becomes the most indubitable of certainties, the most direct and definite of truths."

Beethoven finally came to accept, words, and if one refuses to make a servile copy of Beethoven, there remains only that riddle without an answer, the tone-poem, and that riddle whose answer has already been given, programme music. We have already seen, from *Opera and Drama*, what Wagner thought of the form of programme music, as Berlioz employed it. In a later article on Liszt, he points out in more precise detail how Berlioz, by his method, only succeeded in losing the musical idea without finding a poetic one, music being capable of giving only " the quintessence of an emotional content," and Berlioz trying to force music to suggest, without words or action, definite scenes in a play. In Liszt, however, he found a more genuinely musical conception, an attempt, whether wholly successful or not, to translate the fundamental intention of a poem or of a poet into terms of music ; and this seemed to him to be realised in the Dante Symphony, where " the soul of Dante's poem is shown in purest radiance." The danger of this new form he sees to be that of attempting to do the work of drama without the visible or audible accompaniments of drama, and, in particular, to use, for mere effect, and effect never really explicit, modulations which in his own music he had used for definite and obvious reasons. He counsels the composer never to quit a key so long as what he has to say can be said in it ; and he shows by his own practice how carefully he has observed his rule.

Nothing is more interesting in Wagner's comments on himself than the account, in *A Communication to my Friends*, of his early struggle after originality in melody ; his failure to achieve originality by seeking it ; and how the quality he sought came to him when he had given up every thought but that of expressing his meaning, the meaning of the

words or the situation which he wanted to express. "I no longer," he says, "tried intentionally for customary melody, or, in a sense, for melody at all, but absolutely let it take its rise from the emotional utterance of the words themselves." We may compare one of the wisest of Coleridge's jottings: "Item, that dramatic poetry must be poetry hid in thought and passion, not thought and passion disguised in the dress of poetry." Wagner and Coleridge, two great masters of technique, teach us equally that the greatest art can be produced only by the abandonment of art itself to that primal energy which works after its own laws, not conscious of anything but of the need of exquisitely truthful speech.

There is a certain part of Wagner's writing about music which is fiercely polemical, not only in such broad attacks as the famous *Judaism in Music*, but in regard to individual composers. Except when he jeers at *S. Johannes* Brahms, with what seems a literally personal irritation, there is hardly an instance in which the personal element is not scrupulously subordinated to a conception of right and wrong in music. The musicians whom he attacks are always and only those who were charlatans, like Meyerbeer ("the starling who follows the plough-share down the field, and merrily picks up the earth-worm just uncovered in the furrow"), or triflers, like "sickly" Gounod, or those who turned back on their earlier selves, like the "turgid" later Schumann, or were superficial and did harm to art by their superficiality, like Mendelssohn: "I fancied I was peering into a veritable abyss of superficiality, an utter void."

He is scrupulously just to a musician like Rossini, who, being merely heedless and selfish, let his genius drift with the

tide ;[1] he sees the sincerity and right direction of an incomplete talent like Spontini's ; picks out of the great rubbish-heap of lighter French operas one work in which there is something, if not good, vital, Auber's *Masaniello* ; and, in spite of personal differences and personal affections, can be scrupulously accurate in his analysis of the contradictory genius of Berlioz and in his characterisation of the misunderstood genius of Liszt. But he was incapable of seeing an abuse without trying to set it right, or a sham without trying to stamp it out. In writing a letter of advice to the editor of a new musical journal, he bids him above all wage war against that null and void music which is made as a separate manufacture, music which follows the rules and has no other reason for existence. He hates it as he hates that " whole clinking, twinkling, glittering, glistening show, Grand Opera ! " As you must knock down one structure if you would build another in its place, no detail is too minute for Wagner to define and denounce in the art-traffic of the modern world, and he has not only said finally, and said fruitfully, everything that is to be said in criticism of opera and opera-houses, and the performing and staging of opera, but he has done a special and often overlooked service to music in general by his insistence on the proper rendering of orchestral music. It is to Wagner that we owe almost a revolution in the art of conducting.

In his scheme for a music-school for Munich (1865), Wagner laments that in Germany " we have classical works,

[1] One of Wagner's subtlest and most fundamental pages of criticism is contained in a *Reminiscence of Rossini*, written in 1868, in which he shows that Rossini as truly represents his own trivial age as Palestrina, Bach, Mozart, represented each his own age " of more hopeful effort."

but as yet no classical rendering for them," and he shows how, through the lack of a national Conservatoire, there is no musical tradition in Germany, such as tradition, for instance, for the performance of Mozart as the Paris Conservatoire has preserved for the performance of Gluck. In regard to Beethoven, the condition of things is still worse, for " it is an established fact that Beethoven himself could never obtain an entirely adequate performance of his difficult instrumental works." Here, again, he points out how the Paris Conservatoire spent three years in studying the Ninth Symphony, and how needful such study was, seeing that, in so many cases, " the master's thought is only to be brought to really cognisable utterance through a most intelligent, refined, and dexterous combination and modification of its orchestral expression." In the very important essay of 1870, *On Conducting*, and in separate studies in the rendering of the Ninth Symphony, he explains in detail what these " quite new demands on rendering " are which " arrive with Beethoven's uncommonly expressive use of rhythm" with his minute orchestral shading, and also with those practical errors in scoring which he overlooked because he could not hear them. He shows how not only Beethoven, but Weber (and in Dresden, where Weber had conducted) had come to be given in wholly wrong *tempo* ; how Gluck and Mozart had been misinterpreted by being taken twice too fast or twice too slow. Then in still greater detail, he explains (writing from exile, where he was unable to come into personal contact with musicians) how his own overtures are to be given, and the reason of every shade of expression. Few parts of his writing on music are more valuable than these technical instructions ; and it must be remembered that from Wagner arose the whole modern German school of

conductors, from Bulow to Weingartner, and that the greatest of them, Richter, was the most intimately under his influence. Thus Wagner not only reformed the actual conditions of music, not only created a new and wonderful music of his own, but brought about a scarcely less significant reform in the interpretation of music, which, existing on paper, could be heard nowhere according to the intentions of the composer.

vi

More than any artist of our time, Wagner may be compared with the many-sided artists of the Renaissance ; but he must be compared only to be contrasted. In them an infinity of talents led to no concentration of all in one ; each talent, even in Leonardo, pulls a different way, and painting, science, literature, engineering, the many interpretations and mouldings of nature, are nowhere brought together into any unity, or built up into any single structure. In Wagner, the musician, the poet, the playwright, the thinker, the administrator, all worked to a single end, built up a single structure ; there was no waste of a faculty, nor was any one faculty sacrificed to another. In this he is unique as a man of genius, and in this his creation has its justification in nature. Whether or no the " art-work of the future " is to be on the lines which Wagner laid down ; whether Beethoven may not satisfy the musical sense more completely on one side, and Shakespeare the dramatic sense on the other ; whether, in any case, more has been demonstrated than that in Germany, the soil of music and the only soil in which drama has never taken root, music is required to give dramatic poetry life : all this matters little. A man with a genius for many arts

has brought these arts, in his own work, more intimately into union than they have ever before been brought; and he has delighted the world with this combination of arts as few men of special genius have ever delighted the world with their work in any of these arts. To find a parallel for this achievement we must look back to the Greeks, to the age of Æschylus and Sophocles; and we shall not even here find a parallel; for, if the dramatic poetry was on a vastly higher plane than in the music-drama of Wagner, it is certain that the music was on a vastly lower one. Of the future it is idle to speak; but, at the beginning of the twentieth century, may we not admit that the typical art of the nineteenth century, the art for which it is most likely to be remembered, has been the art, musical and dramatic, of Richard Wagner?

1905.

THE PROBLEM OF RICHARD STRAUSS

"Je ne puis trop admirer un homme qui trouve à une symphonie le défaut d'être trop Cartésienne, et à une autre de pencher vers le système de Spinosa."

ALFRED DE VIGNY.

i

IN that essay on *The School of Giorgione*, in which Walter Pater came perhaps nearer to a complete or final disentangling of the meanings and functions of the arts than any writer on æsthetics has yet done, we are told: "*All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.*" And of music because "in its ideal, consummate moments, the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression; and to it, therefore, to the condition of its perfect moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire."

Now the aim of modern music, which may seem to be carried to at least its furthest logical development in the music of Richard Strauss, is precisely to go backwards from this point towards which all the other arts had tended and aspired in vain, and to take up again that old bondage from which music only had completely freed itself. "For while in all other works of art," Pater tells us, "it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it." With the entrance of the "pro-

gramme" into music, with the attempt to express pure idea, with the appeal to the understanding to make distinctions, music has at once forfeited all the more important of its advantages over the other arts, condescending to an equality which it can never even maintain; putting itself, in fact, at a wilful disadvantage.

Music can express emotion and suggest sensation. It can express emotion as directly as the human voice can express emotion, by an intonation, either unaccompanied by words, as in a shriek or sob, or irrespective of words, as in a phrase which says one thing, and which can be instantly realised to mean another. Music can suggest sensation, either by a direct imitation of some sound in nature (the beating of the heart, the sound of the wind, the rustling of leaves) or by a more subtle appeal to the nerves, like the inexplicable but definite appeal of a colour in the sky, which seems to us joyous, or of the outline of a passing cloud, which seems to us threatening. Music can call up mental states of a more profound, because of a more perfectly disembodied, ecstasy, than any other art, appealing, as it does, directly to the roots of emotion and sensation, and not indirectly, through any medium distinguishable by the understanding. But music can neither express nor suggest an idea apart from emotion or sensation. It cannot do so, not because of its limitations, but because of its infinite reach, because it speaks the language of a world which has not yet subdivided itself into finite ideas.

"Art," says Pater, in the essay from which I have quoted, "is thus always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material." Art has little to do with the brain apart from the emotions; the

brain, apart from the emotions, produces in art only the fantastic or the artificial. When a poet puts aside poetry to give us philosophy (which should lie like dung about the roots of his flower) he is mistaking the supreme function of his art for one of its subordinate functions, but he is hardly so fatally at war with the nature of things as the musician who tries to give us abstract thought in music. Ask music to render to us Spinoza's " He who loves God does not desire that God should love him in return." There we get an abstract idea, and all that music is capable of suggesting to us in it is the emotion of love, which can be suggested in the noblest manner without conveying to us any distinction between a sacred human love and the divine love of God, much less any indication of what is meant by the conflict in magnanimity between these two loves.

Now Strauss tries to give us abstract thought in music, and it is by this attempt to convey or suggest abstract thought that he is distinguished from other composers of " programme " music, and that he claims our chief attention as a phenomenon in modern music. He has gone to Nietzsche for the subject of one of his " tone-poems," *Also sprach Zarathustra*; to Cervantes for another, *Don Quixote*; another is called *Tod und Verklärung* (*Death and Transfiguration*); another, *Ein Heldenleben* (*A Hero's Life*), and in this he offers us a kind of autobiography or Whitman-like *Song of Myself*; finally he has written a *Symphonia Domestica*, in which the clock strikes seven for the baby's bed-hour, and the baby's future is discussed on trombones and trumpets. His admirers having said, as they continue to say, that he had written philosophical music, he defined his intention in these words, on the occasion of the production of *Also sprach Zarathustra* at Berlin in

1896: "I did not intend to write philosophical music or portray Nietzsche's great work musically. I meant to convey musically an idea of the development of the human race from its origin, through the various phases of development, religious as well as scientific, up to Nietzsche's idea of the Uebermensch."

"To convey an idea": there we get, stated nakedly, the fundamental fallacy of the attempt. Here, then, is music labelled "nach Nietzsche." For the name of Nietzsche substitute the name of Calvin; say that you represent the babes, a span long, suffering in hell, and the just made perfect in heaven: the notes, so far as they are capable of conveying a definite idea, would remain as appropriate to the one as to the other. Philosophy or theology, it is all one; indeed, the headlines from a placard of the Salvation Army would serve as well as either for the interpretation of a "tone-poem" which no one would any longer call philosophical.

In his anxiety to convey more precise facts than music can convey by itself, Strauss often gives quotations, quotations in music, which are, after all, only one degree removed from headlines or programmes. In the fifth section of *Ein Heldenleben* he quotes themes from his *Macbeth*, *Don Juan*, *Tod und Verklärung*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, *Guntram*, and the song *Traum durch die Dämmerung*, in order to suggest what he calls "the Hero's Works of Peace." That is one way of making one's meaning clear; it has a good precedent, and recalls the French drummer, Monsieur Le Grand, in Heine, who knew only a little German, but could make himself very intelligible with the drum. "For instance, if I did not know what the word *liberté* meant, he drummed the *Marseillaise*, and I understood him. If I did not under-

stand the word *égalité*, he drummed the march, 'Ça ira . . . les aristocrates à la lanterne!' and I understood him. If I did not know what *bêtise* meant, he drummed the Dessauer March . . . and I understood him." In *Don Juan* I heard unmistakable echoes of the fire-music in *Die Walküre*, and on turning to Lenau's verses I find that the fire of life is supposed to have died out on the hearth. The famous love-scene in *Feuersnot* is partly made from a very slightly altered version of the *Air de Louis XIII.*, the meaning of which, as a quotation, I am unable to guess. On p. 86 of the piano score of the opera, at the words "Da treibt Ihr den Wagner aus dem Thor," we have fragmentary quotations from the *Ring*. In the opening of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Strauss quotes the seven notes to which the priest officiating at the mass sings the "Credo in unum Deum." By the quotation of this easily, though not universally, recognisable phrase he is able, it is true, to convey something approximating to an idea; but it is conveyed, after all, by association of ideas, not directly, and is dependent on something quite apart from the expressive power of music itself.

Music can render only an order of emotion, which may be love or hate, but which will certainly not be mistaken for indifference. Now it may be said, and justly, that there is such a thing as philosophic emotion, the emotion which accompanies the philosopher's brooding over ideas. Take the overture to *Parsifal*: there never was more abstract music, but it is as I have defined Coventry Patmore's best poetry, abstract ecstasy. I do not say that this abstract ecstasy might not be expressed in music which would sum up the emotional part of a philosopher's conception of philosophy. Call it Nietzsche, call it Richard Strauss; I shall

not mind what you call it if it be filled with some vital energy of beauty, if it live, in whatever region of the clouds. I will not call it philosophical music, but I will admit that the order of emotion which it renders is some order of abstract emotion which may as well belong to the philosopher brooding over the destinies of ideas as to the lover brooding over the religion of his passionate creed. Only, I must be sure that the emotion is there, that it makes and fills the form through which it speaks, that its place is not taken by a clever imitation of its outward and unessential part.

ii

Thus far I have spoken only of the theory of the music. But the music itself, it may be said, if only the music is good, what does all this matter? If the music were unmistakably good, all this would matter nothing. It is precisely because the music does not satisfy or convince me as music, that I set myself to task of finding out as much as I can of the reasons why it does not satisfy or convince me. When, in listening to a tone-poem as if it were a symphony, I find that it is learned, ingenious, and sensational, and that the learning does not seem to me a means (as with Bach) but an end in itself, or the means to an end only technically interesting, and that the sensationalism does not seem to me a vital or really splendid emphasis (as in Wagner) but an emphasis not explained by the music as music; when I find many voices crying out of all the corners of the orchestra, and seeming to strive after an articulate speech, with the anguish of dumb things tortured, I cannot but ask for the meaning of the theories which have led to this result. Strauss began by writing music in which there is no suggestion of music as

he now writes it. Call it growth, if you will, deliberate it certainly was, and in considering Strauss's music his theories certainly matter, because they have acted directly upon his musical qualities, distracting them, setting them upon impossible tasks, in which the music is deliberately sacrificed to the expression of something which it can never express. Strauss is what the French call *un cérébral*, which is by no means the same thing as a man of intellect. *Un cérébral* is a man who feels through his brain, in whom emotion transforms itself into idea, rather than in whom idea is transfigured by emotion. Strauss has written a *Don Juan* without sensuality, and it is in his lack of sensuality that I find the reason of his appeal. All modern music is full of sensuality since Wagner first set the fevers of the flesh to music. In the music of Strauss the Germans have discovered the fever of the soul. And that is indeed what Strauss has tried to interpret. He has gone to Nietzsche, as we have seen, for the subject of one of his symphonic poems, *Also sprach Zarathustra*; in *Tod und Verklärung* we find him scene-painting the soul; *Don Juan* is full of reflections concerning the soul; even in *Macbeth* it is "Fate and metaphysical aid" which are what concern him in the tragedy. He is desperately in earnest, doctrinal almost, made uneasy by his convictions. He thinks with all his might, and he sets his thoughts to music. But does he think in music, and what does his thinking come to?

In one of his compositions, a "melodrame" for the piano, intended as a musical accompaniment to the words of Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*, after that hopelessly wrong fashion which Schumann set in his lovely music to *Manfred*, Strauss has shown, significantly as I think, the spirit in which he approaches literature. It is a kind of running commentary

in footnotes, not a new creation in another art. The music tries to express something which is not in itself but in the words of the text, never for a moment transcending those words, carrying them, as music can carry words, into new regions. The ingenuity with which it is put together is like the ingenuity which a detective novelist expends upon his plot. The motives are woven with the utmost care; they return, cross, are combined, broken, exalted, turn to the sob of waves or the sound of wedding-bells; they add italics and capitals to all the points of the story; the web is intricate and every mesh holds firm. But what of the material itself? It is pretty, common, and effective; it has everything that is obvious in sentiment and matter of fact in expression. The notes do not live, each with its individual life; they have been set in order for a purpose, as an accompaniment to a speaking voice and to the words of a poem.

Strauss has no fundamental musical ideas (ideas, that is, which are great as music, apart from their significance to the understanding, and their non-musical significance) and he forces the intensity of his expression because of this lack of genuine musical material. If you intensify nothing to the *n*th degree, you get, after all, nothing; and Strauss builds with water and bakes bread with dust. *Tod und Verklärung* is a vast development towards something which does not come; a preparation of atmosphere, in which no outline can be distinguished: a stage for life, if you will, but a stage on which life does not enter; the creator has not been able to put breath into his world. All the colours of the orchestra, used as a palette, flood one with their own fires and waves; it is as if an avalanche of water swept over one; but out of this tossing sea only here and there a poor little shivering melody puts up its head and clings half-

drowned to a spar. I think of all the painters who have tried to paint without drawing, and of all the painters who have tried to draw by rule and measure, and I think of Blake's warning: "He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light, than his perishing mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all. . . . Leave out this line (the bounding line, Blake calls it, the hard and wiry line of rectitude and certainty) and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the Almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist."

Strauss, it seems to me, lacks this rectitude and certainty of the bounding line, and that is why his music washes over one without colouring one's mind with its own dyes. It is not that he has not a certain mechanical kind of draughtsmanship, and might not be said to draw well as the President of the Royal Academy might be said to draw well. But just as all the elaborate and lifeless drawing of *The Cave of the Sea-Nymphs* is of less value than that rough scribble of lines by which Rodin circumscribes life in one of those rapid pencil drawings done to catch some movement of the model, so the musical science of Strauss, elaborately, showily able though it is, leaves but a vague, because but a lifeless image upon the mind. On coming back after listening to the music of Strauss, one's brain is silent, one's memory hears nothing. There is a feeling as if one had passed in front of some great illumination, as if one had feasted on colours, and wandered in the midst of clouds. But all is over, not a trace remains; there is no pulse ticking anywhere in one's body. One says calmly, how interesting, how curious, this was; a new thing, a thing one must judge fairly, a wonderful thing in its way; but the instant, inevitable thrill, straight to the backbone, the new voice, which one seems to recognise

when one hears it for the first time : where are these ? If I cared more for literature than for music, I imagine that I might care greatly for Strauss. He offers me sound as literature. But I prefer to read my literature, and to hear nothing but music.

Strauss reminds me, at one time of De Quincey or Sydney Dobell, at another of Gustave Moreau or of Arnold Böcklin, and I know that all these names have had their hour of worship. All have some of the qualities which go to the making of great art ; all, in different ways, fail through lack of the vital quality of sincerity, the hard and wiry line of rectitude and certainty. All are rhetorical, all produce their effect by an effort external to the thing itself which they are saying or singing or painting.

Strauss, like De Quincey, has a great mastery over sensation. He can be bewildering, tormenting, enervating, he is always astonishing ; there is electric fluid in his work, but all this electric fluid scatters itself by the way, never concentrates itself to the vital point. He gives you sensation, but he gives it to you coldly, with a calculation of its effect upon you. He gives you colour in sound, but he gives you colour in great blotches, every one meant to dazzle you from a separate angle ; so that it is hardly extravagant to say, as a friend of mine said to me, that his music is like, not so much a kaleidoscope, as a broken kaleidoscope.

iii

Strauss has many moments in which he reminds me of Schumann, and not only the moments in which he tries to bring humour into music. Turn from the *Annie* motive in *Enoch Arden* to the *Eusebius* of the *Carnival*, and you

will readily see all the difference there can be between two passages which it is quite possible to compare with one another. The *Annie* motive is as pretty as can be, it is adequate enough as a suggestion of the somewhat colourless heroine of Tennyson's poem; but how lacking in distinction it is, if you but set it beside the *Eusebius*, in which music requires nothing but music to be its own interpreter. But it is in his attempts at the grotesque that Schumann seems at times actually to lead the way to Strauss. It is from Schumann that Strauss has learnt some of those hobbling rhythms, those abrupt starts, as of a terrified peasant, by which he has sometimes suggested his particular kind of humour in music.

Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks is meant to be a musical joke, and it is like nothing so much as a Toy Symphony, in which the toys are imitated by the instruments of a full orchestra. This kind of realism, far from being a new development in music, was one of the earliest games of the art in its childhood. There never was a time when music did not say "Co-co-ri-co" and "Cuckoo." After Haydn, the joke began to seem outworn. Berlioz took it up again, with his immense seriousness, and brought terror out of pleasantry, and sublimity out of ugliness. Strauss has gone back to the mechanical making of humour. A descending major seventh represents, on Strauss's own authority, "Till strung up to the gibbet." When, as in *Feuersnot*, Strauss writes a common little dance tune, and suggests to us, by the elaborate way in which it is developed, and by the elaboration of the surrounding music, that he means it for a realistic representation of the bourgeois as he is, I am reminded of George Gissing, and of his theory that the only way to

represent commonplace people in art is to write about them in a commonplace way. That was not Wagner's way of working in *Die Meistersinger*. That was not Balzac's way of working in *Les Paysans*. In much of *Till Eulenspiegel* the orchestra jokes after the approved German fashion, *chimera bombinans in vacuo*. German humour is unrelated to any normal, or, indeed, existing thing; it is spun out of the brain without the help of the senses. *Till* mocks with a vast inverted seriousness. But it is without beauty, and the grotesque becomes art when beauty comes into it. Look at the carvings in a Gothic cathedral, look at a Japanese bronze or a monster in a Japanese print. The delicacy which you will find there, lurking in those horrid folds, is what distinguishes great work from common, in the grotesque as in all other forms of art. It is the difference between Puck and the gnome painted on the walls of a German beer-cellar. Strauss tricks out his gnome with all the colours of the lime-lights, but the gnome remains a misshapen creature out of the earth, when the lights are over.

Yet how amazingly clever the thing is, how the orchestra unbends, plays pranks, turns head over heels for the occasion! Music is a grave thing and laughs unwillingly. Strauss compels it to do what he wants, and it does what he wants, with the ferocity of a caged wild beast doing tricks under the whip of the keeper.

Listen to *Don Quixote*, which is meant to be an interpretation of Cervantes, and which is like nothing so much as what one of its admirers has called it, not knowing that he is condemning it by so calling it: "book-illustrations." It is a series of "fantastic variations on a knightly theme," and each of the variations bears a title, such as "The knight reading romances of knight-errantry and losing his reason,"

or "the memorable journey in the enchanted boat." The "journey through the air" is indicated by a species of churning-machine, and I do not know why detached pizzicato notes on the basses, rather than "real water," should be put to tell us that the enchanted boat has capsized, and that the travellers come to land dripping. Sheep bleat through tremolos on the muted brass; very like sheep perhaps, but certainly very unlike music. Throughout, as one listens to music which seems to have been literally founded on the style of Herr Beckmesser in the *Meistersinger*, one listens for some meaning outside the notes, one listens as if following a riddle, so empty of meaning are the notes themselves. There have been commentators of the Bible and of Shakespeare who have worried their texts in much the same manner as Strauss worries the text of *Don Quixote*. Not a word escapes him, he would set commas to music; but so wholly is he blinded to the meaning of Cervantes that he even degrades Don Quixote, making him jaunty. I would call it a piece of vast delusion, if what is so petty might be called, with ever so little intention of praising it, vast. Here, indeed, in this music, but in wholly another sense than the very literal sense in which it was meant, is a battle with sheep and with windmills; here is one who takes every Dulcinea for a country wench, and Mambrino's helmet for any barber's basin. In *Don Quixote* Strauss has been crueller to himself than anywhere else in his music.

To pass from *Don Quixote* to *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and from that to *Ein Heldenleben*, is to come, at each step, nearer to music, in spite of the "groanings which cannot be uttered," in the one, and the kettle-drums and trumpets, and the artillery charging, and the shrieks of the wounded, and the whole smoke and carnage of a literal

battle, in the other. Nothing so unlike Nietzsche was ever written as the *Also sprach Zarathustra* of Strauss, which seems to represent the endless agonies of a bad dream. Beethoven's Seventh Symphony might speak in music something of the proud and exultant and laughing and dancing message of Zarathustra; not this straining effort and unheroic carrying of burdens. But, if we forget Nietzsche and the programme, and listen to the music as music, we shall find the immense technical ability of Strauss more genuinely effective than usual; the imitation of the real thing which he always does with such impressive cleverness, more nearly deceptive than usual. The *Heldenleben*, in spite of the mere folly of the battle-field, is the most coherent thing which Strauss has yet done, and its sonorities, empty though they are of all fine ecstasy, come to us with more brilliant shocks, a more sweeping energy, than elsewhere. That external beauty, that beauty which consists in a new, powerful, astonishing way of saying things, though it can never impose itself in place of the inner beauty which illuminates all things because it is a living core of flame, has its own merit, which must be admitted in its own way, and Strauss is pre-eminent in our time as a master of the quality which, more than any other, conquers and captivates the modern intelligence.

Strauss is the only decadent in music, and he has tried to debauch music, as Stuck has tried to debauch painting, and as Klinger has tried to debauch sculpture, for the satisfaction of a craving which is not "simple, sensuous, and passionate," but elaborate, intellectual and frigid. The whole tendency of modern German art is summed up in his tone-poems, and it is a tendency towards an orgy of the brain, at once idealistic and gross, a perversity which proceeds from impotence, and culminates in that emphasis which is worse than vice, because

it is vulgar. Strauss does things with the orchestra which no one has ever done before ; he delights you with its effects as effects, and though I am complaining of this very fact, I wish to credit him with all that it means, for good and evil. When people call Strauss's music ugly they are mistaking the question at issue. Technique carried to the point to which Strauss carries it has a certain incontestable value, and it matters little whether it is employed on good or bad material. There is such a thing as having a genius for technique, and while even genius for technique never produces a satisfactory result, the plain, simple result of greatness, it produces a result which is sufficiently interesting to detain you by the way. Strauss calls off your attention from the thing itself to the way in which the thing is done ; yes, but I am prepared to admire, with all due reservation, the way in which it is done. The way in which Strauss writes for the orchestra gives me a separate pleasure, just as the way in which Swinburne writes verse, quite apart from what either has to say. Strauss chooses to disconcert the ear ; I am ready to be disconcerted, and to admire the skill with which he disconcerts me. I mind none of the dissonances, queer intervals, sudden changes ; but I want them to convince me of what they are meant to say. The talk of ugliness is a mere device for drawing one aside from the trail. Vital sincerity is what matters, the direct energy of life itself, forcing the music to be its own voice. Do we find that in this astonishingly clever music ?

I do not find it. I find force and tenacity, a determined grip on his material, such as it is, the power to do whatever he can conceive. But I feel that that constructive power which weaves a complex, but tightly woven network of sound is at its best but logic without life ; that though the

main ideas are expressed with admirable force and coherence, they are not great ideas, they are exterior, lifeless, manufactured ideas. To say, as it has not untruly been said, that the details are subservient to the main ideas, is only saying that all these wheels within wheels turn one another, not that they grind corn for bread. In subordinating single effects to the effect of the whole he is only, after all, showing himself a great master of effect. He is that, as De Quincey is that, with the same showy splendour, the same outer shell of greatness. What I do not find in his work is great material, or the great manner of working ; and as he sets himself the biggest tasks, and challenges comparison with the greatest masters, he cannot be accepted, as much smaller men have been accepted, for what they have done, perfect within its limits.

When Strauss takes the orchestra in both fists and sets it clanging, I do not feel that sense of bigness which I feel in any outburst of Beethoven or of Wagner. It comes neither from a great height nor from a great depth. There is always underneath it something either vague or obvious. When an unexpected voice comes stealthily from among the wood-wind, or a harp twists through the 'cellos, or a violin cries out of an abyss of sound, it never " makes familiar things seem strange, or strange things seem familiar." It is all fearfully and wonderfully made, but it is made to satisfy a desire of making, and there is something common in the very effectiveness of the effects. All the windy, exalted music in *Feuersnot* is the same kind of writing as the florid Italian writing, the music of *Trovatore*, mechanical exaltation, crises of the head, much more splendidly developed from an even tinier point of melodic life. All this working up, as of a very calculated madness, may go to the head,

from which it came; never to the heart, to which it was always a stranger. When I play it over on the piano, I get the excitement with which, if I were a mathematician, I should follow the most complicated of Euclid's problems. It would be untrue to say that I do not get from it a very definite pleasure. But it is a dry and dusty pleasure, it speaks to what is most superficial in me, to my admiration of brilliant external things, of difficult things achieved, of things not born but made. It comes to me empty of life, and it touches in me no spring of life.

For my part, I know only one really reassuring test of the value of a work of art. Here is something on which time has not yet set its judgment: place it beside something, as like it as possible, on which the judgment of time seems to have been set, and see if it can endure the comparison. Let it be as unlike as you please, and the test will still hold good. I can pass from an overture of Wagner to a mazurka of Chopin, as easily as from a scene in a play of Shakespeare to a song of Herrick. The one may be greater than the other, but the one is not more genuine than the other. But listen to the Fifth Symphony of Beethoven after listening to the *Zarathustra* tone-poem of Strauss, and what is the result? I have passed at once out of the study, in which a scholar drooped over his book, and wrought at lonely enchantments; nothing but the sky is over me, and I hear the onslaught of an army of sound upon the limits of time and against the ramparts of the world. Or turn from the opera music of Strauss to the opera music of Wagner, and what is the result? I play twenty pages of the piano score of *Feuersnot*, and as I play them I realise the immense ingenuity, the brilliant cleverness, of the music, all its effective qualities, its qualities of solid construction, its particular kind

of mastery. Then I play a single page of *Parsifal* or of *Tristan*, and I am no longer in the same world. That other flashing structure has crumbled into dust, as if at the touch of an Ithuriel's spear. Here I am at home, I hear remote and yet familiar voices, I am alive in the midst of life. I wonder that the other thing could have detained me for a moment, could have come, for a moment, so near to deceiving me.

1902, 1905.

ELEONORA DUSE

i

ELEONORA DUSE is a great artist, the type of the artist, and it is only by accident that she is an actress. Circumstances having made her an actress, she is the greatest of living actresses ; she would have been equally great in any other part. She is an actress through being the antithesis of the actress ; not, indeed, by mere reliance upon nature, but by controlling nature into the forms of her desire, as the sculptor controls the clay under his fingers. She is the artist of her own soul, and it is her force of will, her mastery of herself, not her abandonment to it, which make her what she is.

A great, impersonal force, rushing towards the light, looking to every form of art for help, for sustenance, for inspiration ; a soul which lives on the passionate contemplation of beauty, of all the forms of beauty, without preference for Monteverde or Rodin, for Dante or Leonardo ; an intelligence alert to arrest every wandering idea that can serve it ; Duse seems to live in every nerve and brain-cell with a life which is sleepless and unslacking. She loves art so devotedly that she hates the mockery of her own art, in which disdain forces her to be faultless ; hating the stage, wondering why some one in the audience does not rise from his seat, and leap upon the stage, and cry, " Enough of this ! " she acts half mechanically, with herself, pulling up all the rags

of her own soul, as she says, and flinging them in the face of the people, in a contemptuous rage. When she is not on the stage she forgets the stage; if, in the street, some words of one of her parts come to her with a shiver, it is some passage of poetry, some vivid speech in which a soul speaks. Why she acts as she does, and how she succeeds in being so great an artist while hating her art, is her secret, she tells us; hinting that it is sorrow, discontent, thwarted desires, that have tortured and exalted her into a kind of martyrdom of artistic mastery, on the other side of which the serenity of a pained but indomitable soul triumphs.

To those who have seen Duse only across the footlights, Duse must be impenetrable, almost the contradiction of herself. As one talks with her one begins to realise the artist through the woman. There is in her a sombre and hypnotic quietude, as she broods in meditation, her beautiful firm hand grasping the arm of the chair without movement, but so tightly that the knuckles grow rigid; her body droops sideways in the chair, her head rests on her other hand, the eyes are like a drowsy flame; the whole body thinks. Her face is sad with thought, with the passing over it of all the emotions of the world, which she has felt twice over, in her own flesh, and in the creative energy of her spirit. Her stillness is the stillness of one *in the act* to spring. There is no transition from the energy of speech to the energy of silence. When she speaks, the words leap from her lips one after another, hurrying, but always in coloured clothes and with beautiful movements. As she listens silently to music, she seems to remember, and to drink in nourishment for her soul, as she drinks in perfume, greedily, from flowers, as she possesses a book or a picture, almost with violence. I have never seen a woman so passionate after beauty.

I have never seen a woman so devoured by the life of the soul, by the life of the mind, by the life of the body.

When she talks intently with some one whose ideas interest her, she leaves her chair, comes and sits down quite close, leans over till her face almost touches one's face, the eyes opening wider and wider until one sees an entire rim of white about the great brown pupils ; but, though she occasionally makes a gesture, she never touches one, never lays her hand on one's sleeve ; remains impersonal, though so close. Her intent eyes see nothing but the ideas behind one's forehead ; she has no sense of the human nearness of body to body, only of the intellectual closeness of soul to soul. She is a woman always, but she is a woman almost in the abstract ; the senses are asleep, or awake only to give passion and substance to the disembodied energy of the intellect. When she speaks of beautiful things the face takes light as from an inner source ; the dark and pallid cheeks curve into sensitive folds, the small, thin-lipped mouth, scarcely touched with colour, grows half tender, half ironical, as if smiling at its own abandonment to delight ; an exquisite tremor awakens in it, as if it brushed against the petal of a flower, and thrilled at the contact ; then the mouth opens, freely, and the strong white teeth glitter in a vehement smile.

I have seen her before a Rodin, a Whistler, and a Turner. As she handled the little piece of clay, in which two figures, suggested, not expressed, embrace passionately, in a tightening quiver of the whole body, which seems to thrill under one's eyesight, it seemed as if force drank in force until the soul of the woman passed into the clay, and the soul of the clay passed into the woman. As she stood before the portrait of Carlyle, which she had never seen, though a photograph of it goes with her wherever she goes, there was the quietude

of content, perfect satisfaction, before a piece of ardent and yet chastened perfection. As she moved about the room of the Turners, in the National Gallery, it was with little cries, with a sort of unquiet joy. "The dear madman!" she repeated, before picture after picture, in which a Venice, so false to the Venice which she knew, so true to a Venice which had been actually thus seen, rose up like a mist of opals, all soft flame and rushing light. And, her eyes full of that intoxication, she almost ran out of the gallery, refusing to look to right or left, that she might shut down her eyelids upon their vision.

ii

Here are a few of her words, written down from memory, as nearly as I can in the way she said them; but how empty, as I see them written down, of the colour and life of the words themselves!

"To save the theatre, the theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They poison the air, they make art impossible. It is not drama that they play, but pieces for the theatre. We should return to the Greeks, play in the open air; the drama dies of stalls and boxes and evening dress, and people who come to digest their dinner.

"The one happiness is to shut one's door upon a little room, with a table before one, and to create; to create life in that isolation from life.

"We must bow before the poet, even when it seems to us that he does wrong. He is a poet, he has seen something, he has seen it in that way; we must accept his vision, because it is vision.

" Since Shakespeare and the Greeks there has been no great dramatist, and these gathered up into themselves the whole life of the people and the whole work of their contemporaries. When we say Shakespeare we mean all the Elizabethan drama. Ibsen ? Ibsen is like this room where we are sitting, with all the tables and chairs. Do I care whether you have twenty or twenty-five links on your chain ? Hedda Gabler, Nora and the rest : it is not that I want ! I want Rome and the Coliseum, the Acropolis, Athens : I want beauty, and the flame of life. Maeterlinck ? I adore Maeterlinck. Maeterlinck is a flower. But he only gives me figures in a mist. Yes, as you say, children and spirits.

" I have tried, I have failed, I am condemned to play Sardou and Pinero. Some day another woman will come, young, beautiful, a being all of fire and flame, and will do what I have dreamed ; yes, I am sure of it, it will come ; but I am tired, at my age I cannot begin over again. Ah, my dear friend (to Dolmetsch) how happy you are here. What are those boards up there ? You have had them for twelve years, you say, and they are ripening to be made into instruments ; they are only boards now, one day they will sing. My head is full of all boards like that.

" Rossetti is like a perverse young man who has been nicely brought up : he does not give himself up to it, he is only half himself. Look at Watts's portrait : the fine, mad eyes, and then the weak and heavy chin. The eyes desire some feverish thing, but the mouth and chin hesitate in pursuit. All Rossetti is in that story of the MS. buried in his wife's coffin. He could do it, he could repent of it ; but he should have gone and taken it back himself : he sent his friends !

" Rossetti's Italian verse, how can I give you an idea of

it? Suppose a blind man, and one puts before him a bouquet of flowers, and he smells it, and says: 'This is jasmine, and this is a rose,' but he says it like one who does not know flowers.

"At Athens, in the Museum, there is the mask of a tragic actress; the passion of sorrow, seen for a moment on the face of a woman on the stage, is engraved into it, like a seal. In Rome, quite lately, they have found a bronze head, which has lain under water for centuries; the features are almost effaced, but it is beautiful, as if veiled; the water has passed over it like a caress.

"I have known Wagner in Venice, I have been in Bayreuth, and I saw in Wagner what I feel in his music, a touch of something a little conscious in his supremacy. Wagner said to himself: 'I will do what I want to do, I will force the world to accept me'; and he succeeded, but not in making us forget his intention. The music, after all, never quite abandons itself, is never quite without self-consciousness, it is a tremendous sensuality, not the unconsciousness of passion. When Beethoven writes music he forgets both himself and the world, is conscious only of joy, or sorrow, or the mood which has taken him for its voice.

"Do you remember what Flaubert, that little priest, said of Shakespeare? 'If I had met Shakespeare on the stairs, I should have fainted.' The people I would like to have met are Shakespeare and Velasquez.

"Could I live without the stage? You should not have said that. I have passed three years without acting. I act because I would rather do other things. If I had my will I would live in a ship on the sea, and never come nearer to humanity than that."

iii

The face of Duse is a mask for the tragic passion, a mask which changes from moment to moment, as the soul models the clay of the body after its own changing image. Imagine Rodin at work on a lump of clay. The shapeless thing awakens under his fingers, a vague life creeps into it, hesitating among the forms of life; it is desire, waiting to be born; and it may be born as pity or anguish, love or pride; so fluid is it to the touch, so humbly does it await the accident of choice. The face of Duse is like the clay under the fingers of Rodin. But with her there can be no choice, no arresting moment of repose; but an endless flowing onward of emotion, like tide flowing after tide, moulding and effacing continually. Watch her in that scene of *La Dame aux Camélias*, where Armand's father pleads with Marguerite to give up her lover for the sake of her love. She sits there quietly beside the table, listening and saying nothing, thinking mournfully, debating with herself, conquering herself, making the great decision. The outline of the face is motionless, set hard, clenched into immobility; but within that motionless outline every nerve seems awake, expression after expression sweeps over it, each complete for its instant, each distinct, each like the finished expression of the sculptor, rather than the uncertain forms of life, as they appear to us in passing. The art of the actor, it is supposed, is to give, above all things, this sense of the passing moment, and to give it by a vivacity in expression which shall more than compete with life itself. That is the effective thing; but what Duse does is, after all, the right thing. We have rarely, in real life, the leisure to watch an emotion in which we are the sharers. But there are moments,

in any great crisis, when the soul seems to stand back and look out of impersonal eyes, seeing things as they are. At such moments it is possible to become aware of the beauty, the actual plastic beauty, of passionate or sorrowful emotion, as it interprets itself, in all its succession of moods, upon the face. At such moments, as at the supreme moment of death, all the nobility of which a soul is capable comes transformingly into the body; which is then, indeed, neither the handmaid, nor the accomplice, nor the impediment of the soul, but the soul's visible identity. The art of Duse is to do over again, consciously, this sculpture of the soul upon the body.

The reason why Duse is the greatest actress in the world is that she has a more subtle nature than any other actress, and that she expresses her nature more simply. All her acting seems to come from a great depth, and to be only half telling profound secrets. No play has ever been performed enough, and simple enough, for this woman to say everything she has to say in it. When she has thrilled one, or made one weep, or exalted one with beauty, she seems to be always holding back something else. Her supreme distinction comes from the kind of melancholy wisdom which remains in her face after the passions have swept over it. Other actresses seem to have heaped up into one great, fictitious moment all the scattered energies of their lives, the passions that have come to nothing, the sensations that have withered before they flowered, the thoughts that have never quite been born. The stage is their life; they live only for those three hours of the night; before and after are the intervals between the acts. But to Duse those three hours are the interval in an intense, consistent, strictly personal life; and, the interval over, she returns to herself, as after an interruption.

And this unique fact makes for her the particular quality

of her genuis. When she is on the stage she does not appeal to us with the conscious rhetoric of the actress ; she lets us overlook her, with an unconsciousness which study has formed into a second nature. When she is on the stage she is always thinking ; at times, when the playing of her part is to her a mere piece of contemptuous mechanism, she thinks of other things, and her acting suddenly becomes acting, as in *Fedora* and all but the end of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. At every moment of a play in which emotion becomes sincere, intelligent, or in which it is possible to transform an artificial thing into reality, she is profoundly true to the character she is representing, by being more and more profoundly herself. Then it is Magda, or Gioconda, or Marguerite Gautier who thinks, feels, lives, endures love and anguish and shame and happiness before us ; and it is Magda, or Gioconda, or Marguerite Gautier because it is the primary emotion, the passion itself, everything in it which is most personal because it is most universal.

To act as Duse acts, with an art which is properly the antithesis of what we call acting, is, no doubt, to fail in a lesser thing in order to triumph in a greater. Her greatest moments are the moments of most intense quietness ; she does not send a shudder through the whole house, as Sarah Bernhardt does, playing on one's nerves as on a violin. " Action," with her as with Rimbaud, " is a way of spoiling something," when once action has mastered thought, and got loose to work its own way in the world. It is a disturbance, not an end in itself ; and the very expression of emotion, with her, is all a restraint, the quieting down of a tumult until only the pained reflection of it glimmers out of her eyes, and trembles among the hollows of her cheeks. Contrast her art with the art of Irving, to whom acting is at once a

science and a tradition. To Irving acting is all that the word literally means; it is an art of sharp, detached, yet always delicate movement; he crosses the stage with intention, as he intentionally adopts a fine, crabbed, personal, highly conventional elocution of his own; he is an actor, and he acts, keeping nature, or the too close semblance of nature, carefully out of his composition. He has not gone to himself to invent an art wholly personal wholly, new; his acting is no interruption of an intense inner life, but a craftsmanship into which he has put all he has to give. It is an art wholly rhetoric, that is to say wholly external; his emotion moves to slow music, crystallises into an attitude, dies upon a long-drawn-out word. And it is this external, rhetorical art, this dramatised oratory, that we have always understood as acting, until Duse came upon the stage with new ideas and a new method. At once rhetoric disappeared, with all that is obvious in its loss, as well as what is somewhat less obviously gained by it. Duse's art, in this, is like the art of Verlaine in French poetry; always suggestion, never statement, always a renunciation. It comes into the movement of all the arts, as they seek to escape from the bondage of form, by a new, finer mastery of form, wrought outwards from within, not from without inwards. And it conquers almost the last obstacles, as it turns the one wholly external art, based upon mere imitation, existing upon the commonest terms of illusion, triumphing by exaggeration, into an art wholly subtle, almost spiritual, a suggestion, an evasion, a secrecy.

1900.

A NEW ART OF THE STAGE

i

IN the remarkable experiments of Mr. Gordon Craig, I seem to see the suggestion of a new art of the stage, an art no longer realistic, but conventional, no longer imitative, but symbolical. In Mr. Craig's staging there is the incalculable element, the element that comes of itself, and cannot be coaxed into coming. But in what is incalculable there may be equal parts of inspiration and of accident. How much, in Mr. Craig's staging, is inspiration, how much is accident? That is, after all, the important question.

Mr. Craig, it is certain, has a genius for line, for novel effects of line. His line is entirely his own; he works in squares and straight lines, hardly ever in curves. He drapes the stage into a square with cloths; he divides these cloths by vertical lines, carrying the eye straight up to an immense height, fixing it into a rigid attention. He sets squares of pattern and structure on the stage; he forms his groups into irregular squares, and sets them moving in straight lines, which double on themselves like the two arms of a compass; he puts square patterns on the dresses, and drapes the arms with ribbons that hang to the ground, and make almost a square of the body when the arms are held out at right angles. He prefers gestures that have no curves in them; the arms held straight up, or straight forward, or straight out sideways.

He likes the act of kneeling, in which the body is bent into a sharp angle ; he likes a sudden spring to the feet, with the arms held straight up. He links his groups by an arrangement of poles and ribbons, something in the manner of a maypole ; each figure is held to the centre by a tightly stretched line like the spoke of a wheel. Even when, as in this case, the pattern forms into a circle, the circle is segmented by straight lines.

This severe treatment of line gives breadth and dignity to what might otherwise be merely fantastic. Mr. Craig is happiest when he can play at children's games with his figures, as in almost the whole of *The Masque of Love*. When he is entirely his own master, not dependent on any kind of reality, he invents really like a child, and his fairy-tale comes right, because it is not tied by any grown-up logic. Then his living design is like an arabesque within strict limits, held in from wandering and losing itself by those square lines which rim it implacably round.

Then, again, his effects are produced simply. Most of the costumes in *The Masque of Love* were made of sacking, stitched roughly together. Under the cunning handling of the light, they gave you any illusion you pleased, and the beggars of the masque were not more appropriately clothed than the kings and queens. All had dignity, all reposed the eye.

The aim of modern staging is to intensify the reality of things, to give you the illusion of an actual room, or meadow, or mountain. We have arrived at a great skill in giving this crude illusion of reality. Our stage painters can imitate anything, but what they cannot give us is the emotion which the playwright, if he is an artist, wishes to indicate by means of his scene. It is the very closeness of the imitation which

makes our minds unable to accept it. The eye rebounds, so to speak, from this canvas as real as wood, this wood as real as water, this water which is actual water. Mr. Craig aims at taking us beyond reality; he replaces the pattern of the thing itself by the pattern which that thing evokes in his mind, the symbol of the thing. As, in conventional art, the artist unpicks the structure of the rose to build up a mental image of the rose, in some formal pattern which his brain makes over again, like a new creation from the beginning, a new organism, so, in this new convention of the stage, a plain cloth, modulated by light, can stand for space or for limit, may be the tight walls of a tent or the sky and the clouds. The eye loses itself among these severe, precise, and yet mysterious lines and surfaces; the mind is easily at home in them; it accepts them as readily as it accepts the convention by which, in a poetical play, men speak in verse rather than in prose.

Success, of course, in this form of art lies in the perfecting of its emotional expressiveness. Even yet Mr. Craig has not done much more, perhaps, than indicate what may be done with the material which he finds in his hands. For instance, the obvious criticism upon his mounting of *Acis and Galatea* is, that he has mounted a pastoral, and put nothing pastoral into his mounting. And this criticism is partly just. Yet there are parts, especially the end of Act I., where he has perfectly achieved the rendering of pastoral feeling according to his own conventions. The tent is there with its square walls, not a glimpse of meadow or sky comes into the severe design, and yet, as the nymphs in their straight dresses and straight ribbons lie back laughing on the ground, and the children, with their little modern brown straw hats, toss paper roses among them, and the coloured

balloons (which you may buy in the street for a penny) are tossed into the air, carrying the eye upward, as if it saw the wind chasing the clouds, you feel the actual sensation of a pastoral scene, of country joy, of the spring and the open air, as no trickle of real water in a trough, no sheaves of real corn among painted trees, no imitation of a flushed sky on canvas, could trick you into feeling it. The imagination has been caught; a suggestion has been given which strikes straight to "the nerves of delight"; and be sure those nerves, that imagination, will do the rest, better, more effectually, than the deliberate assent of the eyes to an imitation of natural appearances.

Take again some of those drawings of stage scenery which we have not yet been able to see realised, the decoration for Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* and *Venice Preserved*, and for *Hamlet* and for *The Masque of London*. Everywhere a wild and exquisite scenic imagination builds up shadowy structures which seem to have arisen by some strange hazard, and to the sound of an unfamiliar music, and which are often literally like music in the cadences of their design. All have dignity, remoteness, vastness; a sense of mystery, an actual emotion in their lines and faint colours. There is poetry in this bare prose framework of stage properties, a quality of grace which is almost evasive, and seems to point out new possibilities of drama, as it provides new, scarcely hoped for, possibilities to the dramatist.

Take, for instance, *The Masque of London*. It is Piranesi, and it is London of to-day, seen in lineal vision, and it is a design, not merely on paper, but built up definitely between the wings of the stage. It is a vast scaffolding, rising out of ruins, and ascending to toppling heights; all its crazy shapes seem to lean over in the air, and at intervals a little

weary being climbs with obscure patience. In one of the *Hamlet* drawings we see the room in the castle at Elsinore into which Ophelia is to come with her bewildered singing; and the room waits, tall, vague, exquisitely still and strange, a ghostly room, prepared for beauty and madness. There is another room, with tall doors and windows and abrupt pools of light on the floor; and another, with its significant shadows, its two enigmatic figures, in which a drama of Maeterlinck might find its own atmosphere awaiting it. And in yet another all is gesture; walls, half-opened doors, half-seen windows, the huddled people at a doorway, and a tall figure of a woman raised up in the foreground, who seems to motion to them vehemently. Colour co-operates with line in effects of rich and yet delicate vagueness; there are always the long, straight lines, the sense of height and space, the bare surfaces, the subtle, significant shadows, out of which Mr. Craig has long since learned to evoke stage pictures more beautiful and more suggestive than any that have been seen on the stage in our time.

The whole stage art of Mr. Craig is a protest against realism, and it is to realism that we owe whatever is most conspicuously bad in the mounting of plays at the present day. Wagner did some of the harm; for he refused to realise some of the necessary limitations of stage illusion, and persisted in believing that the stage artist could compete successfully with nature in the production of landscape, light, and shadow. Yet Wagner himself protested against the heaps of unrealising detail under which Shakespeare was buried, in his own time, on the German stage, as he is buried on the English stage on our own. No scene-painter, no scene-shifter, no limelight man, will ever delude us by his moon or meadow or moving clouds or water. His business is to aid the poet's

illusion, that illusion of beauty which is the chief excuse for stage plays at all, when once we have passed beyond the "rose-pink and dirty drab," in Meredith's sufficing phrase, of stage romance and stage reality. The distinction, the incomparable merit, of Mr. Craig is that he conceives his setting as the poet conceives his drama. The verse in most Shakespearean revivals rebounds from a backcloth of metallic solidity; the scenery shuts in the players, not upon Shakespeare's dream, but upon as nearly as possible "real" historical *bric-à-brac*. What Mr. Craig does, or would do if he were allowed to do it, is to open all sorts of "magic casements," and to thrust back all kinds of real and probable limits, and to give at last a little scope for the imagination of the playwright who is also a poet.

I do not yet know of what Mr. Craig is capable, how far he can carry his happy natural gifts towards mastery. But he has done so much already that I want to see him doing more; I want to see him accepting all the difficulties of his new art frankly, and grappling with them. For the staging of Maeterlinck, especially for such a play as *La Mort de Tintagiles*, his art, just as it is, would suffice. Here are plays which exist anywhere in space, which evade reality, which do all they can to become disembodied in the very moment in which they become visible. They have atmosphere without locality, and that is what Mr. Craig can give us so easily. But I would like to see him stage an opera of Wagner, *Tristan*, or the *Meistersinger* even. Wagner has perfected at Bayreuth his own conception of what scenery should be; he has done better than any one else what most other stage-craftsmen have been trying to do. He allows more than they do to convention, but even his convention aims at convincing the eye; the dragon of the *Ring* is

as real a beast as Wagner could invent in his competition with nature's invention of the snake and the crocodile. But there are those who prefer Wagner's music in the concert-room to Wagner's music even at Bayreuth. Unless the whole aim and theory of Wagner was wrong, this preference is wrong. I should like, at least as an experiment, to see what Mr. Craig would make of one of the operas. I am not sure that he would not reconcile those who prefer Wagner in the concert-room to this new kind of performance on the stage. He would give us the mind's attractive symbols of all these crude German pictures ; he would strike away the footlights from before these vast German singers, and bring a ghostly light to creep down about their hoods and untightened drapings ; he would bring, I think, the atmosphere of the music for the first time upon the stage.

Then I would like to see Mr. Craig go further still ; I would like to see him deal with a purely modern play, a play which takes place indoors, in the house of middle-class people. He should mount the typical modern play, Ibsen's *Ghosts*. Think of that room " in Mrs. Alving's country-house, beside one of the large fjords in Western Norway." Do you remember the stage directions ? In the first act the glimpse, through the glass windows of the conservatory, of " a gloomy fjord landscape, veiled by steady rain " ; in the second " the mist still lies heavy over the landscape " ; in the third the lamp burning on the table, the darkness outside, the " faint glow from the conflagration." And always " the room as before." What might not Mr. Craig do with that room ! What, precisely, I do not know ; but I am sure that his method is capable of an extension which will take in that room, and, if it can take in that room, it can take in all of modern life which is of importance to the playwright.

ii

Most people begin with theory, and go on, if they go on, to carry their theory into practice. Mr. Gordon Craig has done a better thing, and, having begun by creating a new art of the stage on the actual boards of the theatre, has followed up his practical demonstrations by a book of theory, in which he explains what he has done, telling us also what he hopes to do. *The Art of the Theatre* is a little book, hardly more than a pamphlet, but every page is full of original thought. Until I read it, I was not sure how much in Mr. Craig's work was intention and how much happy accident. Whether or not we agree with every part of his theory, he has left no part unthought out. His theory, then, in brief, is this : he defines the theatre as " a place in which the entire beauty of life can be unfolded, and not only the external beauty of the world, but the inner beauty and meaning of life." He would make the theatre a temple in which a continual ceremony unfolds and proclaims the beauty of life, and, like the churches of other religions, it is to be, not for the few, but for the people. The art of the theatre is to be " neither acting nor the play, it is not scene nor dance, but it consists of all the elements of which these things are composed : action, which is the very spirit of acting ; words, which are the body of the play ; line and colour, which are the very heart of the scene ; rhythm, which is the very essence of dance." The art of the theatre is addressed in the first place to the eyes, and the first dramatist spoke through " poetic action, which is dance, or prose action, which is gesture." In the modern theatre a play is no longer " a balance of actions, words, dance and scene, but it is either all words or all scene." The business of the stage director, who is to be the artist of the theatre,

is to bring back the theatre to its true purpose. He begins by taking the dramatist's play, and sets himself to interpret it visibly on the boards. He reads it and gets his general impression; "he first of all chooses certain colours, which seem to him to be in harmony with the spirit of the play, rejecting other colours as out of tune. He then weaves into a pattern certain objects—an arch, a fountain, a balcony, a bed—using the chosen object as the centre of his design. Then he adds to this all the objects which are mentioned in the play, and which are necessary to be seen. To these he adds, one by one, each character which appears in the play, and gradually each movement of each character, and each costume. . . . While this pattern for the eye is being devised, the designer is being guided as much by the sound of the verse or prose as by the sense or spirit." At the first rehearsal the actors are all in their stage dresses, and have all learned their words. The picture is there; the stage director then lights his picture. He then sets it in motion, teaching each actor to "move across our sight in a certain way, passing to a certain point, in a certain light, his head at a certain angle, his eyes, his feet, his whole body in tune with the play." The play is then ready to begin, we may suppose? By no means. "There will not be any play," says the stage director to the sheep-like playgoer who has been meekly drifting with the current of dialogue, "there will not be any play in the sense in which you use the word. When," he is told, "the theatre has become a masterpiece of mechanism, when it has invented a technique, it will without any effort develop a *creative art* of its own." And that art is to be created out of three things, the three bare necessities of the stage: action, scene and voice. By action is meant "both gesture and dancing, the prose and poetry of action"; by scene "all

which comes before the eye, such as the lighting, costume, as well as the scenery"; by voice, "the spoken word or the word which is sung, in contradiction to the word which is read; for the word written to be spoken and the word written to be read are two entirely different things."

Up to this last surprising point, which, however, has been stealthily led up to by a very persuasive semblance of logic, how admirable is every definition and every suggestion! Everything that is said is as self-evidently true as it is commonly and consistently neglected. Who will deny that the theatre is a visible creation of life, and that life is, first of all, action; to the spectator, in the stalls or in the street, a thing first of all seen, and afterwards, to the measure of one's care or capability, heard and understood? That life should be created over again in the theatre, not in a crude material copy, but in the spirit of all art, "by means of things that do not possess life until the artist has touched them": this also will hardly be denied. This visible creation of life is (until the words come into it) like a picture, and it is made in the spirit of the painter, who fails equally if in his picture he departs from life, or if he but imitates without interpreting it. But it is not, after all, through its power of adding the life of speech to the life of motion that the theatre attains its full perfection? Can that perfection be attained by limiting its scope to what must remain its only materials to work with: action, scene and voice?

The question is this: whether the theatre is the invention of the dramatist, and of use only in so far as it interprets his creative work; or whether the dramatist is the invention of the theatre, which has made him for its own ends, and will be able, when it has wholly achieved its mechanism, to dispense

with him altogether, except perhaps as a kind of prompter. And the crux of the question is this : that to the supreme critic of literature, to Charles Lamb, a play of Shakespeare, *Lear* or *Hamlet*, seems too great for the stage, so that when acted it loses the rarest part of its magic ; while to the ideal stage-director, to Mr. Gordon Craig, *Hamlet* should not be acted because it is not so calculated for the theatre that it depends for its ultimate achievement on gesture, scene, costume, and all that the theatre has to offer ; not, that is, that it is greater or less in its art, but that it is different. If we are content to believe both, each from his own point of view, is it not Craig who will seem the more logical ? for why, it will be asked, should the greatest dramatist of the world have produced his greatest work under an illusion, that is for acting ? Why should all the vital drama of the world, the only drama that is vital as literature, have been thus produced ? If all this has indeed been produced under an illusion, and in the face of nature, how invaluable must such an illusion be, and how careful should we be to refrain from destroying any of its power over the mind !

An illusion is one thing, a compromise is another, and every art is made up in part of more and more ingenious compromises. The sculptor, who works in the round, and in visible competition with the forms of life, has to allow for the tricks of the eye. He tricks the eye that he may suggest, beyond the literal contour, the movement of muscle and the actual passage of blood under the skin, the momentary creasing of flesh ; and he balances his hollows and bosses that he may suggest the play of air about living flesh : all his compromises are with fact, to attain life. May not the art of the dramatist be in like manner a compromise with the

logic of his mechanism, a deliberate and praiseworthy twisting of ends into means? The end of technique is not in itself, but in its service to the artist; and the technique, which Mr. Craig would end with, might, if it were carried out, be utilised by the dramatist to his own incalculable advantage.

1902, 1906.

A SYMBOLIST FARCE

THE performance of *Ubu Roi comédie guignolesque*, by Alfred Jarry, at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, if of little importance in itself, is of considerable importance as a symptom of tendencies now agitating the minds of the younger generation in France. The play is the first Symbolist farce; it has the crudity of a schoolboy or a savage; what is, after all, most remarkable about it is the insolence with which a younger writer mocks at civilisation itself, sweeping all art, along with all humanity, into the same inglorious slop-pail. That it should ever have been written is sufficiently surprising; but it has been praised by Catulle Mendès, by Anatole France; the book has gone through several editions, and now the play has been mounted by Lugné-Poe (whose mainly Symbolist Théâtre de l'Œuvre has so significantly taken the place of the mainly Naturalist Théâtre Libre) and it has been given, twice over, before a crowded house, howling but dominated, a house buffeted into sheer bewilderment by the wooden lath of a gross, undiscriminating, infantile Philosopher-Pantaloon.

Jarry's idea, in this symbolical buffoonery, was to satirise humanity by setting human beings to play the part of marionettes, hiding their faces behind cardboard masks, tuning their voices to the howl and squeak which tradition

has considerately assigned to the voices of that wooden world, and mimicking the rigid inflexibility and spasmodic life of puppets by a hopping and reeling gait. The author, who has written an essay, *De l'Inutilité du Théâtre au Théâtre*, has explained that a performance of marionettes can only suitably be accompanied by the marionette music of fairs; and therefore the motions of these puppet-people were accompanied, from time to time, by an orchestra of piano, cymbals, and drums, played behind the scenes, and reproducing the note of just such a band as one might find on the wooden platform outside a canvas booth in a fair. The action is supposed to take place "in Poland, that is to say, in the land of Nowhere"; and the scenery was painted to represent, by a child's conventions, indoors and out of doors, and even the torrid, temperate, and arctic zones at once. Opposite to you, at the back of the stage, you saw apple-trees in bloom, under a blue sky, and against the sky a small closed window and a fireplace, containing an alchemist's crucible, through the very midst of which (with what refining intentions, who knows?) trooped in and out these clamorous and sanguinary persons of the drama. On the left was painted a bed, and at the foot of the bed a bare tree, and snow falling. On the right were palm-trees, about one of which coiled a boa-constrictor; a door opened against the sky, and beside the door a skeleton dangled from a gallows. Changes of scene were announced by the simple Elizabethan method of a placard, roughly scrawled with such stage directions as this: "La scène représente la province de Livonie couverte de neige." A venerable gentleman in evening-dress, Father Time as we see him on Christmas-trees, trotted across the stage on the points of his toes between every scene, and hung the new placard on its nail.

And before the curtain rose, in what was after all but a local mockery of a local absurdity, two workmen backed upon the stage carrying a cane-bottomed chair and a little wooden table covered with a sack, and Jarry (a small, very young man, with a hard, clever face) seated himself at the table and read his own "conférence" on his own play.

In explaining his intentions, Jarry seemed to me rather to be explaining the intentions which he ought to have had, or which he had singularly failed to carry out. To be a sort of comic antithesis to Maeterlinck, as the ancient satiric play was at once a pendant and an antithesis to the tragedy of its time: that, certainly, though he did not say it, might be taken to have been one of the legitimate ambitions of the writer of *Ubu Roi*. "C'est l'instauration du Guignol Littéraire," as he affirms, and a generation which has exhausted every intoxicant, every soluble preparation of the artificial, may well seek a last sensation in the wire-pulled passions, the wooden faces of marionettes, and, by a further illusion, of marionettes who are living people; living people pretending to be those wooden images of life which pretend to be living people. There one sees, truly, the excuse, the occasion, for an immense satire, a Swiftian or Rabelaisian parody of the world. But at present Jarry has not the intellectual grasp nor the mastery of a new technique needful to carry out so vast a programme. Swift, Rabelais, is above all the satirist with intention, and the satirist who writes. Jarry has somehow forgotten his intention before writing, and his writing when he takes pen in hand. *Ubu Roi* is the gesticulation of a young savage of the woods, and it is his manner of expressing his disapproval of civilisation. Satire which is without distinctions becomes obvious, and

Jarry's present conception of satire is very much that of the schoolboy to whom a practical joke is the most efficacious form of humour, and bad words scrawled on a slate the most salient kind of wit. These jerking and hopping, these filthy, fighting, swearing " gamins " of wood bring us back, let us admit, and may legitimately bring us back, to what is primitively animal in humanity. Ubu may be indeed " un sac à vices, un outre à vins, une poche à bile, un empereur romain de la décadence, idoine à toutes cacades, pillard, paillard, braillard, un goulaphre," as the author describes him ; but he is not sufficiently that, he is not invented with sufficient profundity, nor set in motion with a sufficiently comic invention. He does not quite attain to the true dignity of the marionette. He remains a monkey on a stick.

Yet, after all, Ubu has his interest, his value ; and that strange experiment of the Rue Blanche its importance as a step in the movement of minds. For it shows us that the artificial, when it has gone the full circle, comes back to the primitive : des Esseintes relapses into the Red Indian. Jarry is logical, with that frightful irresistible logic of the French. In our search for sensation we have exhausted sensation ; and now, before a people who have perfected the fine shades to their vanishing point, who have subtilised delicacy of perception into the annihilation of the very senses through which we take in ecstasy, a literary Sansculotte has shrieked for hours that unspeakable word of the gutter which was the refrain, the *Leitmotiv*, of this comedy of masks. Just as the seeker after pleasure whom pleasure has exhausted, so the seeker after the material illusions of literary artifice turns finally to that first, subjugated, never quite exterminated, element of cruelty which is one of the links

which bind us to the earth. *Ubu Roi* is the brutality out of which we have achieved civilisation, and those painted, massacring puppets the destroying elements which are as old as the world, and which we can never chase out of the system of natural things.

1898.

PANTOMIME AND THE POETIC DRAMA

IT might be contended that in the art of the theatre an absolute criticism can admit nothing between pantomime and the poetic drama. In these two extremes, drama in outline and drama elaborated to the final point, the appeal is to the primary emotions, and with an economy and luxuriance of means, each of which is in its own way inimitable. It is an error to believe that pantomime is merely a way of doing without words, that it is merely the equivalent of words. Pantomime is thinking overheard. It begins and ends before words have formed themselves, in a deeper consciousness than that of speech. And it addresses itself, by the artful limitations of its craft, to universal human experience, knowing that the moment it departs from those broad lines it will become unintelligible. It risks existence on its own perfection, as the rope-dancer does, to whom a false step means downfall. And it appeals, perhaps a little too democratically, to people of all nations. Becoming aristocratic, getting sheer through the accidents of life without staying by the way in the manner of the realistic drama, it adds the beauty of primary emotions, and is the poetic drama. Between lie the non-essentials, a kind of waste.

All drama, until one comes to the poetic drama, is an imitation of life, as a photograph is an imitation of life; and for this reason it can have, at the best, but a secondary

kind of imaginative existence, the appeal of the mere copy To the poetic drama nature no longer exists ; or rather, nature becomes, as it has been truly said nature should become to the painter, a dictionary. Here is choice, selection, combination : the supreme interference of beauty. Pantomime, in its limited way, is again no mere imitation of nature : it is a transposition, as an etching transposes a picture. It observes nature in order that it may create a new form for itself, a form which, in its enigmatic silence, appeals straight to the intellect for its comprehension, and, like ballet, to the intellect through the eyes.

And pantomime has that mystery which is one of the requirements of true art. To watch it is like dreaming. How silently, in dreams, one gathers the unheard sound of words from the lips that do but make pretence of saying them ! And does not every one know that terrifying impossibility of speaking which fastens one to the ground for the eternity of a second, in what is the new, perhaps truer, computation of time in dreams ? Something like that sense of suspense seems to hang over the silent actors in pantomime, giving them a nervous exaltation which has its subtle, immediate effect upon us, in tragic or comic situation. The silence becomes an atmosphere, and with a very curious power of giving distinction to form and motion.

I do not see why people should ever break silence on the stage except to speak poetry. Here, in pantomime, you have a gracious, expressive silence, beauty of gesture, a perfectly discreet appeal to the emotions, a transposition of the world into an elegant, accepted convention : in a word, all the outlines of the picture. Poetry comes, not only looking beautiful, not only excluding what should not be there, but saying beautiful things, the only things worth saying when

once words begin to be used, not for their mere utility (the ordering of dinner, a bargain, the arrangement of one's affairs), but for their beauty in a form of art. Here is the picture completed, awaiting only, for its ideal presentment, the interpretative accompaniment of music, which Wagner will give it, in what is so far the most complete form of art yet realised.

1898.

THE WORLD AS BALLET

THE abstract thinker, to whom the question of practical morality is indifferent, has always loved dancing, as naturally as the moralist has hated it. The Puritan, from his own point of view, is always right, though it suits us, often enough, for wider reasons, to deny his logic. The dance is life, animal life, having its own way passionately. Part of that natural madness which men were once wise enough to include in religion, it began with the worship of the disturbing deities, the gods of ecstasy, for whom wantonness, and wine, and all things in which energy passes into an ideal excess, were sacred. It was cast out of religion when religion cast out nature: for, like nature itself, it is a thing of evil to those who renounce instincts. From the first it has mimed the instincts. It can render birth and death, and it is always going over and over the eternal pantomime of love; it can be all the passions, and all the languors; but it idealises these mere acts, gracious or brutal, into more than a picture; for it is more than a beautiful reflection, it has in it life itself, as it shadows life; and it is farther from life than a picture. Humanity, youth, beauty, playing the part of itself, and consciously, in a travesty, more natural than nature, more artificial than art: but we lose ourselves in the boundless bewilderments of its contradictions.

The dance, then, is art because it is doubly nature: and if nature, as we are told, is sinful, it is doubly sinful. A waltz,

in a drawing-room, takes us suddenly out of all that convention, away from those guardians of our order who sit around the walls, approvingly, unconsciously ; in its winding motion it raises an invisible wall about us, shutting us off from the whole world, in with ourselves ; in its fatal rhythm, never either beginning or ending, slow, insinuating, gathering impetus which must be held back, which must rise into the blood, it tells us that life flows even as that, so passionately and so easily and so inevitably ; and it is possession and abandonment, the very pattern and symbol of earthly love. Here is nature (to be renounced, to be at least restrained) hurried violently, deliberately to boiling point. And now look at the dance, on the stage, a mere spectator. Here are all these young bodies, made more alluring by an artificial heightening of whites and reds on the face, displaying, employing, all their natural beauty, themselves full of the sense of joy in motion, or affecting that enjoyment, offered to our eyes like a bouquet of flowers, a bouquet of living flowers, which have all the glitter of artificial ones. As they dance, under the changing lights, so human, so remote, so desirable, so evasive, coming and going to the sound of a thin, heady music which marks the rhythm of their movements like a kind of clinging drapery, they seem to sum up in themselves the appeal of everything in the world that is passing, and coloured, and to be enjoyed ; everything that bids us take no thought for the morrow, and dissolve the will into slumber, and give way luxuriously to the delightful present.

How fitly then, in its very essence, does the art of dancing symbolise life ; and so faithful a rendering of its actual instincts ! And to the abstract thinker, as to the artist, all this really primitive feeling, all this acceptance of the instincts

which it idealises, and out of which it makes its own beauty, is precisely what gives dancing its pre-eminence among the more than imitative arts. The artist, it is indeed true, is never quite satisfied with his statue which remains cold, does not come to life. In every art men are pressing forward, more and more eagerly, farther and farther beyond the limits of their art, in the desire to do the impossible : to create life. Realising all humanity to be but a masque of shadows, and this solid world an impromptu stage as temporary as they, it is with a pathetic desire of some last illusion, which shall deceive even ourselves, that we are consumed with this hunger to create, to make something for ourselves, of at least the same shadowy reality as that about us. The art of the ballet awaits us, with its shadowy and real life, its power of letting humanity drift into a rhythm so much of its own, and with ornament so much more generous than its wont.

And something in the particular elegance of the dance, the scenery ; the avoidance of emphasis, the evasive, winding turn of things ; and, above all, the intellectual as well as sensuous appeal of a living symbol, which can but reach the brain through the eyes, in the visual, concrete, imaginative way ; has seemed to make the ballet concentrate in itself a good deal of the modern ideal in matters of artistic expression. Nothing is stated, there is no intrusion of words used for the irrelevant purpose of describing ; a world rises before one, the picture lasts only long enough to have been there : and the dancer, with her gesture, all pure symbol, evokes, from her mere beautiful motion, idea, sensation, all that one need ever know of event. There, before you, she exists, in harmonious life ; and her rhythm reveals to you the soul of her imagined being.

1898.

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